4-2021

Attachment and Identity in Higher Education: Lived Experiences of Korean Adoptees

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This dissertation, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the College of Graduate and Professional Studies of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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by

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April 2021

Dedication

I dedicate this work to the participants of this study. Thank you for sharing your stories for the advancement of understanding Korean adoptees. I also dedicate this work to our Korean birth mothers whom we do not know. They chose to give us away for reasons we do not know. May we all find peace and healing in our lives.

I dedicate this work to my adoptive father John Lehn who was the son of German immigrants in the early 1900s. He grew up with poverty and hunger, but he was skilled and knew how to achieve beyond his limitations. He served in the Korean War where he witnessed the tragedy of war and the multitude of orphans. After returning home from Korea, he got married and became a successful businessman in rural Nebraska. He and my adoptive mother adopted a daughter who was my sister Joyce, and then they adopted me. I never understood the implications of adoption, why looking different was a big deal, or the grief that came with it. As I accept adoption for what it was in my own life, I am grateful to a farm boy who grew up with a compassionate heart and a caring German immigrant mother who taught him to be kind. I am grateful to a little girl who grew up in rags and was abandoned by her father. I am grateful to the little girl who was also abandoned in Busan and became an advocate for university students. I am grateful for the opportunities that I have experienced. I am grateful for my children, my only known bloodline family. Amanda Leigh, Miles Robert Lehn, Megan Elizabeth June, and John Michael, you are wonderful sons and daughters. Elijah, Abram, Amos, Abner, Finn, and Henry, may you have long lives and learn about your Korean roots.

 I am grateful to the Creator for His goodness.

Sing to Hashem, chant hymns to His name; extol Him who rides the clouds; Hashem is His name. Exult in His presence–the father of orphans, the Champion of widows, Hashem, in His holy habitation. Psalms 68:5–6 (The Israel Bible)

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the people who have been supportive of my efforts in this endeavor. To the faculty and staff and Abilene Christian University that include Stacy Hayes from the first phone conversation, Courtney Hernandez, library staff, writing center staff, Julie Johnson Archer, Dr. Basil Considine, and all of the instructors. Thank you to my chair Dr. Bill Hunt II for guidance and support. I appreciate your time and understanding! Thank you to the committee Dr. Andrew Lumpe, Dr. Scott Strawn, and Dr. Dana McMichael. I am grateful to all of you for your dedication to students in helping them attain their goals in higher education.

Thank you to the ACU cohort for group support. Thank you to Dr. Shenita Alsbrook and Dr. Angie Steward for helping me to push through to the end.

Thank you to my coworkers Dr. Laurie Schmidt and Professor Judy Naber, who encouraged me to think more about Korean adoptees. Thank you to Dr. Joy Hoffman for making it possible for me to attend the KAAN (Korean American Adoptee Network) conference in 2019 where I found a lot more Korean adoptees and Kellie Broecker Donastorg, who affirmed that I was not alone. Thank you to the many KADs I have met in this Korean adoptee community who have shared their stories of loss and grief. Thank you to Sasha Frugone for showing that possibilities exist and permission to be happy and fulfilled is okay!

Most of all thank you to my family and life partner for enduring late suppers, cold suppers, and lights on until the middle of the night!

Abstract

South Korea has been the largest sending country of adoptees since the Korean War. Many of the adoptees were placed in predominantly White communities in the Midwest United States. In the existing literature, researchers revealed that Korean adoptees expressed feelings related to loss of ethnic identity, birth culture, and place of belonging. It has not been fully understood how attachment and identity influence Korean adoptees in their pursuit of a higher education. Therefore, this study sought to examine the impacts of attachment to birth culture, adoptive culture, and adoptive family combined with issues of ethnic identity in the lived experiences of Korean adoptees in pursuit of a degree in higher education. This was a qualitative case study designed to inspect the how and why questions of this problem. The researcher collected data through interviews, journals, and member checking. The sample included 14 adult Korean adoptees who had grown up in the Midwest and had graduated from a four-year college or university in the Midwest between 1987 and 2017. There were two male participants and 12 female participants. Data were deconstructed, continuously rearranged, and analyzed through in vivo coding. The researcher found that Korean adoptees experienced concerns related to attachment to birth culture, Korean identity, and stereotypes. The researcher concluded that Korean adoptees pursued higher education because of their adoptive family's expectations.

Keywords: Asian, attachment, ethnic identity, higher education, international adoption, Korean adoptees (KADs), South Korea, transnational adoption

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The population that I studied included adoptees born in South Korea, but who were removed from their birth country. These individuals were raised in predominantly White-populated Midwestern United States. Korean adoptees have physical features that are distinctly Asian and set them apart from their White peers. Because of this difference these individuals appear to be easy targets of racism, marginalization, and acceptance or rejection in the predominantly White societies in which they have been raised. These individuals have also been challenged with a unique set of circumstances concerning their birth culture, adopted culture, and familial attachments. In this chapter I present the background of the problem, statement of the problem, purpose statement, theoretical framework, the importance of the study, importance regarding to college students, research questions, and key terms.

Background

The Korean War began on June 25, 1950, and was halted by a truce in July 1953. The result was a divided war-torn country, now separated into two—North Korea and South Korea. The war left tens of thousands of Korean and mixed-race children as orphans (Korean Adoption Services, 2019). Although the exact number of orphans could not be accounted for, it was most often stated as 100,000 (Oh, 2015). These orphans were of two groups: full-Korean or GI babies of mixed-race (Oh, 2015), which had been abandoned or lost as a result of the war. Only 1,500 of these orphans were actual GI babies, but Koreans and Americans labeled them as GI babies. Consequently, this labeling seemed to mark the way for these children to become the victims of mistreatment based on "their illegitimacy, racial mixture, and assumptions that their mothers were prostitutes" (Oh, 2015, p. 23). GI babies were not allowed to be listed on a family register due to strong beliefs of cultural purity. They were children without a country. Korean President Rhee stated that "[they] will never have any real place in Korean society" (Oh, 2015, p. 51).

Therefore, hundreds of these children from South Korea were sent to the United States and a small number of them were placed in Scandinavian countries (Korean Adoption Services, 2019).

Intercountry transnational adoption began in 1955 when Henry and Bertha Holt of Eugene, Oregon, adopted 12 Korean orphans (Herman, 2012). This was the foundational event that afforded Korean orphans a life of opportunity with primarily White middle-class families in the United States. From the beginning of this historic event regarding transnational adoptees, there have been countless more adoptions of South Korean children. South Korea has sent the largest numbers of children for adoption, making up more than 20% of all international adoptions (Hu et al., 2017). Additional statistics show that 150,000 children had been adopted by people in fourteen countries as of 2000. Between 1999 and 2016 there were 20,332 adoptions from South Korea (Historical international adoption statistics, United States and World, 2016).

Efforts of those who wanted to save orphans and mixed-race children of South Korea enabled White families to adopt these children, raise them in American homes, and afford them lives of social and political privilege (Park Nelson, 2016). Harry Holt, the founder of the Holt Adoption Program, believed race did not matter and that love prevailed (Oh, 2015). Harry Holt's colorblind attitude was steeped in Christian beliefs. Oh (2015) suggested color blind views focused on mixing races in order to increase tolerance and end racism.

In 1949, long before the practice of adoption from South Korea, author Pearl S. Buck had established her long-term foster care home, Welcome House. This home was established for the care of mixed-race children of Asian descent (Graves, 2019). Later, Welcome House became an adoption agency in which mixed-raced children were placed with White American families. Buck proclaimed that mixed-race adoption, in addition to creating families, implemented visible antiracist and anticommunist practices by Americans that helped the country. Later, Buck established the Pearl S. Buck Foundation Opportunity Center in Bucheon, South Korea to meet

the medical, physical, and psychological needs of Korean mothers and their children (Graves, 2019). It was noted that Buck's advocacy for mixed-race children involved promoting them as "superior" (p. 192). She was also quoted as stating that "a hybrid people has always a higher intelligence and a beauty greater that is possessed by the so-called pure races" (p. 192). Her writings consistently supported these assertions, which challenged matched adoptions according to race (Graves, 2019).

Despite of overseas placements in the United States and Scandinavia, which relieved physical suffering, other psychological issues, such as loss of culture and ethnic identity, surfaced as these children developed in a mostly White culture (Hoffman & Peña, 2013; Kim, 2010; Park Nelson, 2016). Because state and Korean adoption agencies worked closely together, greater numbers of adoptees were placed in states that had the strongest connections to the Korean agencies. Such agencies were located mainly in the Midwest. The regions of concentrated placement included Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Nebraska, Michigan, Montana, and South Dakota. The Pacific Northwest concentrated placements in Oregon and Washington. The Northeast state placements included New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Vermont, while the West included Utah and Idaho. Very few placements went to states in the South or Southwest (Kim, 2010). Minnesota had the highest population of South Korean adoptees in the United States and the world with the exception of Sweden (Park Nelson, 2016). The estimated number of adoptees in Minnesota was between 10,000 and 15,000.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the first group of South Korean adoptees was growing up alongside their White counterparts, and they began to attend colleges and universities. Through a review of the literature regarding South Korean adoptees, there appears to be a scarcity of scholarly research focused on this unique group of individuals in their higher education pursuits. Because 6.8 million people have identified as being of two or more races, topics concerning

multiracialism began to surface on college campuses (Wong & Buckner, 2008). Wong and Buckner (2008) argued that biracial and transracially adopted students have been pressured to choose between cultures. Situations that force individuals to choose one culture over the other can be compared to the dilemma of South Korean adoptees. Even though they have been raised in White American culture, their physical features visually distinguish them from their White counterparts (Feigelman, 2000). Consequently, because Korean adoptees have been raised in White society with a lack of visual sameness, they have been prompted to question their background (Hoffman & Peña, 2013). These individuals have also expressed feelings of cultural and ethnic confusion (Hoffman & Peña, 2013).

Korean adoptees have grown up and attended institutions of higher education in their home placement states or in states of their own choice. Student support services on college and university campuses have been lacking in services for this specific population of students (Gummadam et al., 2016; Suda & Hartlep, 2016). Korean adoptees continue to make up an increasing population of students on the campuses of higher education. Many of these students bring a rich, complex background of identity exploration, academic stereotypes, and other life purpose questions that can accompany the circumstances of being an adoptee.

A growing body of literature addresses the issues of identity formation and the discovery of ethnic heritage and culture (Hoffman & Peña, 2013; Samuels, 2010; Shiao & Tuan, 2008). Other concerns of Korean adoptees have been racism, marginalization, and invisibility (Chang et al., 2017), and making meaning of adoption (Langrehr et al., 2015). The model minority myth (Wing, 2007) was found in extant literature and is addressed in the literature review. However, there has been little research concerning Korean adoptees' perceptions of attachment coupled with identity, and how these two entities influence the adoptees' pursuit of higher education.

Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical framework serves as a platform or structure to guide a research study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Additionally, it is the "application of a theory to offer an explanation of an event or shed some light on a particular phenomenon or research problem" (p.165). The theoretical framework further serves as the cohesive agent between the many interconnected parts of a research study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

I based this study on the theoretical frameworks of ethnic identity (Phinney & Rotherham, 1987) and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1982). These theories support the problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions. As indicated in Chapter 2, the main themes reported by Korean adoptees center around ethnic identity and attachment. Additionally, I used the vectors of student development theory as a theoretical framework as it applied to practices in higher education (Chickering, 1969, 1972).

Ethnic Identity

The theory of ethnic identity is based on the assumption that an individual identifies as belonging to an ethnic group which helps form the individual's thinking, perceptions, feelings, and behaviors (Phinney & Rotheram, 1987). Ethnic identity was also noted as being an encompassing concept that includes ethnic awareness, ethnic self-identification, ethnic attitudes, and ethnic behaviors. Although it was not well-understood, Phinney and Rotheram (1987) assumed these components interact with an individual's cognitive function. Phinney (1990) posited that ethnic identity was the psychological functioning core for ethnic and racial minorities. It was further suggested that comprehension of ethnic identity was complicated by the singleness that sets groups apart from one another. A general definition was that ethnic identity referred to an individual's "sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one's thinking, perceptions, feeling, and behavior that is due to ethnic group membership" (Phinney &

Rotherham, 1987, p. 13). Ethnic identity was noted as being separate from an individual's personal identity. However, the researchers recognized that the two separate identities could influence one another. They emphasized the idea that ethnic identity was "the individual's acquisition of group patterns" (p. 13). Four components of ethnic identity were ethnic awareness, ethnic self-identification, ethnic attitudes, and ethnic behaviors (Phinney & Rotherham, 1987). Although previous researchers used the term ethnic identity to refer to these components alone or in combination, the authors stated that the interaction was complex.

Phinney and Alipuria (1990) found that ethnic identity played a significantly different part between college-aged individuals from minority and majority groups. The authors concluded that ethnic identity was an important feature of identity development among the four groups of students in their study. The four groups included Asian-Americans, Blacks, Mexican-Americans, and Whites. These researchers found that over half of the participants rated ethnicity as being important in the formation of identity. Further, Phinney and Alipuria (1990) deemed this information as being important because the data were gathered over four different groups. Additionally, the authors noted that most of the previous identity research had been performed by White researchers with White participants. Therefore, their findings were significant due to their inclusion of diverse participants.

Attachment

Bowlby (1969, 1982) referred to attachment behavior as caregiving and the tie between a child and mother. They argued that a strong attachment between mother and child resulted in security for the child. When a child is separated from their mother or attached figure they experience anger and anxiety, as noted by Bowlby (1973). These emotions are also displayed when children are repeatedly threatened by the possibility of abandonment or separation. Bowlby (1969, 1982) suggested that humans are born with an embedded, complex behavioral system of

attachment, which develops as they grow up in their family surroundings. The complex behavioral system possesses stimuli that build the bonds of attachment in the days following birth. Bowlby (1969, 1982) stated that the human complex behavioral system includes examples of neonatal stimuli, described as "crying, sucking, clinging, and orientation, followed by smiling, babbling, crawling, and walking" (p. 265). These stimuli produce a response that facilitates an attachment to certain objects or individuals throughout the development of the infant into childhood and later on into adulthood. Bowlby (1969, 1982) suggested that in the development of attachment, nature and nurture continuously interact. Such suggestions have been substantiated in differences between institutionalized infants and those in the care of families. Even at 12 months of age, institutionalized infants display no attachments to any specific person in comparison to infants raised in familial situations.

Anger and anxiety are identified with the loss of attachment and separation (Bowlby, 1973). Children separated from their parents for long periods exhibit anger toward their parent(s) when they are reunited. Additionally, Bowlby noted that anger is present in individuals who lose someone to death, and the anger is sometimes directed at the deceased person (1973).

Vectors of Student Identity

Chickering (1969, 1975) proposed that the development of identity in college students is dependent on the development of competence, emotions, and autonomy. When a firm sense of identity is recognized, other vectors of development can be nurtured. The other vectors are interpersonal relationships, development of purpose, and the development of integrity. Chickering (1969,1975) posited six major attributes of an institution that influence a college students' development, including (a) clarity of objectives and internal consistency, (b) institutional size, (c) curriculum, teaching, and evaluation, (d) residence hall arrangements, (e) faculty and administration, and (f) friends, groups, and student culture. It was further suggested

that the vectors of student development can be hindered or accelerated depending on the institutions' actions regarding these six major influential areas (Chickering, 1969, 1975). Therefore, it was dependent upon higher education to narrow the gap between "what is known and what is done." (Chickering, 1969, 1975, p. 280). Chickering further acknowledged that "educational problems are outrunning solutions, not so much for lack of relevant principles, and not because useful steps are obscure, but because implementation is occurring at a snail's pace, because basic concepts are disdained" (p. 280).

Problem Statement

Hoffman and Peña (2013) found that South Korean adoptees raised within predominantly White U.S. culture felt they were neither White nor Korean, which resulted in feelings of being in-between and not fully connected to either culture. Individuals who embraced their ethnic identity before attending college had been given opportunities for identity exploration. In contrast, those who did not embrace ethnic identity as college freshmen did not seek out ethnic exploration opportunities (Hoffman & Peña, 2013).

In a quantitative study, Beaupre et al. (2015) examined how this population of individuals explored and committed to ethnic and adoptive identities. In their findings, they concluded that the amount of ethnic socialization was directly related to ethnic identities, and that psychological adjustment appeared to be sound. Additionally, Kim et al. (2010) studied the belonging and exclusion experiences of South Korean-born adoptees concerning ethnic and racial identity. Through their findings, they suggested that exposure to diverse experiences alleviated problems of ethnic identity related to physical appearance and being raised in White families. Attachment and adaptation experiences of international adoptees were further substantiated by Barcons et al. (2014). Although their sample focused on individuals from Eastern Europe, their studies did

confirm the need for caring relationships for adoptees to develop healthy identities and attachments.

It remains unknown how South Korean adoptees raised in White U.S. culture perceive connections to birth culture, adopted culture, and adopted families and how these connections influence the pursuit of degrees in higher education. Awareness and comprehension of unique challenges could better equip parents, instructors, and college service practitioners to help Korean adoptees navigate pathways in higher education.

Purpose Statement

Based on theories of ethnic identity (Phinney & Rotherham, 1987) and attachment (Bowlby, 1969, 1982), the purpose of this study was to examine how South Korean adoptees' perceptions of lived experiences regarding connection to birth culture, adopted culture, and attachment to adopted families influenced their pursuit of degree attainment in higher education. This study explored the South Korean adoptees' perceptions of these connections from a lens of belonging in academia and their role in higher education.

A qualitative case study approach was best suited for this study because of its flexible design that allowed for a deep comprehensive look into the bounded case (Harrison et al., 2017). Further, the case was bounded by the cohort sample of individuals, who were South Korean-born adoptees, grew up in the Midwestern United States, and graduated from a Midwestern four-year higher education institution in the United States between the years 1987 and 2017.

Importance of the Study

There is a paucity of literature regarding Korean adoptees who possess concerns about connection and attachment coupled with ethnic identity as they pursue degrees in higher education. A lack of understanding such connections could be of concern for Korean adoptees faced with issues of ethnic identity (Hoffman & Peña, 2013; Shiao & Tuan, 2008), feelings of

marginalization (Yeo et al., 2019), and feeling as though they do not have a place of belonging while attending colleges or universities (Suda & Hartlep, 2016). Transnational adoptees, specifically Asians, have increasing rates of school enrollments (Witenstein & Saito, 2015); therefore, enhanced student services need to be available.

To best meet the needs of the Korean adoptee students in higher education it is important to understand their lived experiences. A better understanding of how their feelings, connections, and attachments coalesce and impact their pursuit of higher education could strengthen college and university student services. Also, a deeper understanding of Korean adoptees and their complex challenges could help parents assist their adoptee in preparation for higher educational pursuits.

Student-service practitioners could be instrumental in creating environments that offer opportunities for students to examine issues related to identity (Evans et al., 2010). Also, the sense of belonging on a college campus was found to be correlated with psychological adjustment among ethnic minority students (Gummadam et al., 2016). Positive psychological adjustment contributes to student success. Supported by the theory of student identity (Chickering, 1969, 1972), these concepts could be efficiently practiced when meeting the needs of the transracial adoptee community and more specifically, Korean adoptees.

As Korean adoptees continue to enter higher education, it will be important to implement best practices in student services and the delivery of academics to prepare young Korean adoptees for work in a competitive global society. Additionally, these individuals must be able to relate well with others and work as contributing members of diverse teams. To effectively relate to others, individuals must first be secure in their own exceptional identity. Each person possesses a unique strength and quality that enables them to solve problems that possibly no one else could achieve; therefore, it is important for Korean adoptees to securely define their own

identity (Palmer, 2011). Additionally, it is noteworthy to recognize that empowered Korean adoptees can confidently meet worldly challenges, develop their abilities as global thinkers, and become change leaders within organizations (Palmer, 2011).

Research Questions

I designed the research questions for this study to examine how and why Korean adoptees pursue higher education.

RQ1: What are the perceptions of Korean adoptees regarding connection to birth culture in their pursuit of higher education?

RQ2: What are the perceptions and lived experiences of Korean adoptees regarding connection to adopted culture in their pursuit of a degree in higher education?

RQ3: What are the perceptions and lived experiences of Korean adoptees regarding connection to their adopted families in their pursuit of a degree in higher education?

Key Terms

Asian. Asian has been defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as people who have origins in the Far East, Southeast Asia, or Indian subcontinent (Barnes & Bennet, 2002). Although Asians have been grouped together, Yeo et al., (2019) made distinctions between Asian International Students and Asian American students. Asian International students are in the United States to attend higher learning institutions, while Asian American students are U.S. citizens.

Attachment. I used attachment interchangeably with *caregiving*, as stated by Bowlby (1969, 1982). Attachment was used in conjunction with *emotional bonding* and *behavior adjustment* (MacKay et al., 2010). Swartz et al. (2012) used the synonym *bonding*.

Ethnic identity. Refers to an individual's acquisition to group patterns, including thinking, perceptions, feelings, and behaviors (Phinney & Rotherham, 1987).

International adoption. International adoption was stated by Hübinette as "the transferal of tens of thousands of predominantly Asian children to Western countries for adoption" (2005, p. 227). This term is used interchangeably with transnational adoption.

Korean adoptees (KADs). Korean adoptees was a term first used when children from Korea were placed for adoptions in American homes (Hübinette, 2004). More recent terms are Korean transnational or transracial adoptee (Kim et. al., 2010; Reynolds et. al., 2019).

Transnational adoption. Throughout the literature, the term transnational adoption has been used to signify the adoption of a child from one country to another (Langrehr et al., 2015; Ferrari et al., 2017; Suda & Hartlep, 2016; Lee, 2016).

Summary

In summary, Chapter 1 presents a brief background of how South Korean adoptees were brought to the United States as a result of the Korean War. The problem statement section described Korean adoptees' unique issues of identity and attachment and the unknown impact of these two factors on their pursuit of higher education. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to examine how ethnic identity and attachment in relation to birth culture, adopted culture, and adopted family influenced higher education attainment. I based this study on the theories of ethnic identity (Phinney& Rotherham, 1987) and attachment (Bowlby, 1969, 1982). Further, Chickering's (1969, 1972) vectors of student development theory strengthened the need for such a study. There is evidence for the need of stronger support services for Korean adoptees in higher education. A review of the literature in Chapter 2 addresses major themes that I examined in the literature concerning Korean adoptees. Throughout the remainder of this dissertation, I use the terms *Korean adoptees* and *KADs* synonymously with the term *South Korean adoptees*.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I present an examination of seven themes related to Korean adoptees found in the literature. These seven themes include ethnic identity, attachment, behavior, adoptive family, acceptance, psychological adjustment, and college or university experience. I also included the subthemes of ethnicity, ethnic socialization, color and culture, discrimination, race, family color-blindness, and marginality. Moreover, I recognized that themes and subthemes often intersect and are mentioned within cross-context. A brief section was included to address the theories of ethnic identity (Phinney & Rotherham, 1987), attachment (Bowlby, 1969, 1982) and the vectors of student development (Chickering, 1969, 1972). I concluded the chapter with a summary of the themes and a rationale for the present study research questions.

I searched Abilene Christian University's (ACU's) Margaret Brown Library online databases using the following keywords: *Asian*, *Korean adoptees (KAs)*, *transnational adoption*, *international adoption*, *attachment*, and *higher education*. A broad review of the literature regarding the general topic of transnational adoptees revealed seven salient themes that included the following:

(a) ethnic identity (Hoffman & Peña, 2013; Hu et al., 2017; Hubbinette, 2007; Shiao & Tuan, 2008; Witenstein & Saito, 2015),

(b) attachment and bonding (Swartz et al., 2012; Pylypa, 2016),

(c) behavior (Ahn et al., 2017; Fensbo, 2003),

(d) adoptive family (Lee, 2016; Pinderhughes et al., 2015; Kreider & Raleigh, 2016),

(e) acceptance (Mohanty, 2015);

(f) psychological adjustment (Yoon, 2001; Boivin & Hassan, 2015);

(g) college or university experience.

Subthemes appeared to be fluid between main categories and also intersected within categories. Subthemes of ethnic identity included the following:

(a) ethnic exploration (Shiao & Tuan, 2008), Korean or White (Hoffman & Peña, 2013),

(b) third space (Witenstein & Saito, 2015),

(c) visual sameness (Yeo, et al, 2019),

(d) ethnic socialization (Beaupre et al., 2015; Hu et. al., 2017; Umaña et al., 2014), and

(e) ethnicity and culture (Song & Lee, 2009).

Subthemes of familial attachment and bonding included these elements:

(a) maternal bonding (Swartz et al., 2012; Darnell et al., 2017),

(b) attachment and adaption (Barcons et al., 2014),

(c) attachment and school (MacKay et al., 2010; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004).

Problem behavior subthemes included these elements:

(a) age of adoption (Ahn et al., 2017; Feigleman, 2000),

(b) biological or adoptive family (Fensbo, 2001; Anderson et al., 2015).

Subthemes of adoptive family included the following:

(a) visual likeness (Hoffman & Peña, 2013),

(b) encouragement (Lee, 2016; Langrehr et al., 2015);

(c) importance of parents (Baden, 2015; Beaupre et al., 2015; Brocious, 2014; Godon et al., 2014; Pinderhughes et al., 2015; Yoon, 2001), color and culture (Godon et al., 2014; Lee, 2016; Song & Lee, 2009),

(d) discrimination (Kim et al., 2010; Kreider & Raleigh, 2016),

(e) race (Kim et al., 2010; Langrehr et al., 2014),

(f) color-blindness within families (Chang et al., 2017; Pinderhughes et al., 2015),

(e) marginality (Brocious, 2014).

In the literature, the model minority myth (Wing, 2007) was identified to include all Asians. This myth was first used to categorize Japanese Americans who became successful during the 1960s. Soon, Chinese Americans were also considered members of this group, even though, as new immigrants, many of them lived in poverty and spoke little or no English. Later on during the 1990s, the model minority myth was viewed by some to include the rapid growth of Asian students on U.S. college and university campuses. Wing (2007) suggested that the model minority stereotype was a dangerous agent that created division between people and placed Asian Americans in serious or perilous circumstances. The misconceptions that all Asians excel at math was experienced by students in Wing's study (2007). Individuals who experienced the implications of these stereotypes had feelings of anger for being judged based on their ethnicity, instead of as an individual.

Theme 1: Ethnic Identity

The category of identity includes subthemes of ethnic exploration (Shiao & Tuan, 2008), being Korean or White (Hoffman & Peña, 2013); the existence of a third space (Witenstein & Saito, 2015); visual sameness (Hoffman & Peña, 2013); ethnic socialization (Hu et al., 2017), and ethnicity and culture (Song & Lee, 2009). These six subthemes of identity are recognized in the literature as existing in families with transnationally adopted children. Most of the researchers upheld the suggestion that exposure to ethnic-cultural backgrounds strengthened an individual's identity with their ethnic identity. However, the length of exposure and context were often determinants of the individuals' level of ethnic identity.

Ethnic Exploration

Adulthood appears to be a critical time for Korean adoptees to explore their identity as Koreans (Shiao & Tuan, 2008). It was suggested that social context was influential in the availability and type of opportunities for ethnic exploration by transracial adoptees. In their

study, Shiao and Tuan (2008) identified participants, 26 non-explorers and 32 explorers, in relation to ethnic exploration. They grouped participants based on ethnic activities—none, modest, or substantial. Out of the 26 participants, 16 of the non-explorers had no direct contact with Asians or Asian Americans. The remaining 10 individuals experienced some contact with Asians and Asian Americans after college but did not pursue further interaction. Of the 32 explorers, 10 were labeled as modest because of their limited exposure or contact with other Asians or Asian Americans. The remaining 22 participants were substantial explorers, which, according to the criteria, lists taking Asian or Asian American studies, spending time living in Asia or places of high Asian populations, participating in Asian American organizations, or being absorbed in Asian or Asian American social networks.

Participants in the non-explorer group had been affected by three factors, which included the absence of opportunities, inability to partake in opportunities, or lack of interest. The researchers found within this group that three adoptees had been traditional students in earlier decades of the 1970s and 1980s when there was not an emphasis on diversity programming. They further found that other adoptees spent their early adulthoods in racially homogeneous neighborhoods and workplaces. Also, adoptees who had significant family and life responsibilities in their early adulthood had limited access or contact with other Asians or Asian Americans. A few of the adoptees in the non-explorer group were labeled as being in dysfunctional situations. These individuals had experienced extremely stressful family relationships due to their adoption situations. Additionally, they found that the importance of race and ethnicity were not strong enough issues for some adoptees due to rigorous college programs or weak identity as an Asian. Some non-explorers had an aversion to Asians and Asian Americans. Individuals in this section of non-explorers actively avoided being with other Asians.

One participant of their study admitted avoiding other Asians because of negative experiences and was ashamed of being Asian.

Individuals identified as explorers were interviewed by Shiao and Tuan (2008) to examine how social context molded ethnic exploration in early adulthood. They found that institutional and historical events influenced how adoptees became explorers of social exposure and cultural heritage. The adoptees engaged in various types and levels of exploration. The researchers stated that historical situations slowed nominal explorers and influenced the availability of resources for exploration. Institutional settings offered resources and availability for personal explorations and networks. However, during the 1970s and 1980s, it appeared that military service in Asia was the most nonschool setting for identity exploration. By the 1990s, this setting shifted because of opportunities in Asian business. Identity exploration for the individuals in the study took place in employment and also in higher education where there were more opportunities.

There were four nominal, personal explorers who grew up with Asian friends and entered young adulthood in the early 1990s. While one individual expressed affection for Asian American environments, she also noted that the cultural expectations of adult Korean immigrants usually created discomfort in Korean adoptees. Taking a course on the Asian adoptee experience was an activity that helped two personal explorers better understand their adoption.

There were 19 individuals who pursued social exposure during their higher education experience. Shiao and Tuan (2008) noted that seven of the participants stopped at a modest level and 12 continued to a significant level. They stated that modest explorers engaged in a combination of taking a class in Asian American studies, wrote a paper on Korean adoptee topics in a non-Asian course, and participated in student networks that were diverse but not predominantly Asian. These individuals appreciated their network of Asian acquaintances

but kept a fair distance from them. The explorers at the significant level moved to a level of bonding with other Asian individuals, which resulted in deeper engagement with Asian-related classes and social networks and shifted their self-perception of American identity.

Shiao and Tuan (2008) concluded that social context shaped the conditions and the content of ethnic exploration. The prominence of racial visibility and the availability of opportunities for explorations facilitated the quest for identity exploration. Also, racial salience was absent when adoptees stated that they were highly accepted by their non-Asian peers (Shiao & Tuan, 2008).

Korean or White

Because Korean adoptees were mostly adopted into White families, they took on the expected identity of being White, racially Korean, and Korean transnational adoptees (Hoffman & Peña, 2013). Many Korean adoptees felt that they were not Korean enough because they were raised in a White family and community as noted by Hoffman and Peña (2013). These individuals did not feel they belonged entirely to either group. These researchers also found that exploration of identity included adoptee identity, ethnic self-discovery, and the notion of Whiteness. Furthermore, they presented the idea that their results were substantiated by the previous research of Palmer (2010), who posited the notion that Korean adoptees were engaged in a dance of identities in which Whiteness was their assimilated cultural identity due because they were raised by White parents.

Third Space

Witenstein and Saito (2015) synthesized understanding of the *third space* and its influence among transnational Asian adoptees regarding educational outcomes. These researchers also used the term *hybrid space* to describe the place in which transnational adoptees live. This third space could be explained as an existence somewhere between the country of birth

and the United States. Further, the third space was described as being on the "boundary of two cultures" (Witenstein & Saito, 2015, p. 118). Because the Asian adoptee was cut off from their countries of birth and forced to live in the Western culture of their adoptive families, they did not have experience with the native language and culture (Hübinette, 2007). It was recognized that adoptees could use their experiences of being different as they navigated school situations to further accept and explore their ethnic identity (Witenstein & Saito, 2015). Description of the third space brought clarity to the time and place in which Korean adoptees began development or awareness of their identity.

Visual Sameness

Yeo et al. (2019) studied mistaken identity among Asian International and Asian American students on college campuses. One key finding of their research was that Asians were monolithically categorized based on visual perceptions regardless of their domestic or international status. This idea of visual sameness was found in the main theme of university belonging.

Hoffman and Peña (2013) found that Korean adoptees lacked having contact with other individuals who looked the same. This theme was also present in familial situations where adoptees reported that they wanted to have contact with others whom they could identify. These individuals had been adopted into mostly White families who lived in areas with limited exposure to other Koreans. Therefore, this subtheme is also found under the theme of adoptive family.

Ethnic Socialization

Hu et al. (2017) answered the question of how adoptees' perceptions of identity are formed. Their study focused on seeking the correlation between ethnic socialization and ethnic identity development in a seven-year follow-up of adopted Korean American adolescents. They

concluded that parental ethnic socialization efforts during the childhood years influenced the adopted child's engagement with ethnic peers and comfortability with ethnic identity. These researchers supported the idea that parental influence was greater than peer influence during adolescence. They suggested that parental conversations concerning ethnicity could encourage identity exploration. The importance of ethnic and racial identity formation during adolescence in Korean adoptees and other internationally adopted children was also noted by Umaña et al. (2014). During this time of development, these children might not see themselves identifying as Korean because they are not ethnically Korean enough as compared to Korean immigrants (Umaña et al., 2014). Additionally, less ethnic socialization was found to be related to less commitment to identifying as Korean by adoptees, and more socialization was found to be related to more committed identity (Beaupre et al., 2015).

Ethnicity and Culture

In their mixed-methods examination of cultural life experiences of Korean adult adoptees, Song and Lee (2009) recognized prominent intertwining themes of culture and ethnicity. They found that a significant relationship existed between identity and experienced cultural activities in adulthood. Song and Lee (2009) suggested the time of cultural socialization was equally important to the type of cultural exposure. They identified the most prominent time for positive ethnic identity development appeared to be between the ages of 18 and 21 years.

Theme 2: Familial Attachment and Bonding

In their narrative inquiry, Pryor and Pettinelli (2011) stated that intercountry adoptive parents worked toward developing a secure attachment with their adopted children. These parents expressed that attachment and or bonding with their child was the beginning of their relationship. However, this study was archival in nature with 28 families participating and 14 of them adopting from Asia. No information was given to the specificity of the country of origin.

Additionally, Langrehr et al. (2015) reported that families with strong open communication about adoption had positively strengthened relationships between adoptees and their families.

Maternal Bonding

Swartz et al. (2012) examined maternal-bonding between mothers and internationally adopted children. Their subjects were 13 mothers who had adopted international children under the age of 4. The researchers found that maternal bonding occurred in phases and that mothers became more emotionally attached when their child allowed them to offer comfort or became excited to see them after being apart. It was also during these times that mothers expressed that the child was becoming attached because of the displayed behaviors of the child. The mothers in this study made continual, concentrated efforts to integrate the child into the biological family. A portion of the mothers in the study also helped their child learn about the child's adoption, birth country, and outwardly celebrated their day of adoption. The involvement of the mothers in these processes gave ways for them to confidently form deeper bonds with their adopted child without feeling threats to their bonded relationship (Swartz et al., 2012). This study was focused on the perceptions of mothers. Also, only two of the participants had children adopted from South Korea.

Darnell et al. (2017) used the term *attachment to adoptive parents* in a qualitative study involving 16 adult Korean adoptees. The adoptees referred to their adoptive parent as "mom" and "dad." They noted that some adoptees used the term *real parents* when they talked of their adoptive parents, which suggested strong attachments between the adoptees and their adoptive parents.

Attachment and Adaptation

To gain a deeper understanding of international adoptees and their formation of attachments and adaptive skills, Barcons et al. (2014) studied 168 adoptees from Eastern Europe.

These researchers recognized three divisions of protective mechanisms that included individual, pre-adoptive, and post-adoptive. Individual aspects included cognitive ability, temperament, focus of control, and self-esteem. Pre-adoptive aspects included conditions in their country of origin, age at the time of adoption, medical care, and already formed attachments with caregivers. Post-adoptive factors were the adoptive parents' attachments and parenting styles. The results of the study indicated that the internationally adopted children had lower patterns of secure attachment than the general population. Children with insecure-avoidant attachment patterns and insecure-ambivalent patterns were proportionally higher than those in the normative sample. They further noted that the number of children with a disorganized attachment pattern was extremely low. Also, the results were independent of adoption age and time spent with the adoptive family. Consequently, Barcons et al. (2014) concluded that adopted children appeared to develop adaptive attachment patterns, regardless of being secure or insecure. They suggested that despite early adverse conditions, international adoptees did develop attachment organizational skills. Further, they confirmed that nourishing and caring relationships could alleviate effects of adverse preadoption environments.

The adoptees' physical and psychological needs were also met when they developed a healthy attachment relationship. Barcons et al. (2014) stated that when these needs were met, then the adoptee could develop their skills for higher levels of proficiency. These researchers also found that the adoptees' adaptive skills were predicated on the socioeconomic status of the adoptive family. Children who were adopted into low and medium-low socioeconomic status families scored lower in adaptive skills than those of their sample of adoptees from Eastern Europe who had been adopted into medium and medium-high socioeconomic status families. Barcons et al. (2004) recognized that the ideal sample population would have included matched gender and age from four continents. Although this study was focused on internationally adopted

children from Eastern Europe, the results helped to identify adoptees at risk of failing to form attachment and appropriate adaptive skills. Further, they posited that early intervention could be used to support the adoptees' well-being.

Attachment and School

MacKay et al. (2010) argued that nurture groups in schools would help students with attachment issues become more able to attain higher academic achievement. Previous research by Pianta and Stuhlman (2004) confirmed that teacher-child relationships were similar to parent-child relationships, and encouraged adaptation in the early school setting. These ideas could be considered for how attachment affects student success in colleges and university settings.

Theme 3: Problem Behavior

Problem behavior was found to be related to the age of adoption (Ahn et al., 2017; Feigelman, 2000). Also, a comparison showed that biological families were able to get along better than adoptive families (Fensbo, 2001). Additionally, open communication with the adoptee about ethnicity and racial differences resulted in less delinquent behaviors (Anderson et al., 2015).

Age of Adoption

From the results of a longitudinal study that took place from 1975 to 1993, Feigelman (2000) gathered baseline data through surveys from an original 737 participating families. The researcher focused on gathering information from large groups of transracial adoptees, which included adoptees from Korea, Vietnam, and Columbia. The sample also included African American and White children born in the United States. Data were gathered again in 1980 and 1981 when most of the participants were in early elementary school. This time there were 372 participants. The last survey was conducted in 1993 when the average age of the participants was 23 and there were 240 responses.

Feigelman (2000) concluded that a correlation existed between age at adoption and adjustment. Further, it was found that when the children reached adulthood, there were no adjustment differences between those adopted at birth and those adopted when they were older. This suggestion was made because the older adoptee continued to be raised by their adoptive parents. Therefore, the problems that occurred during development could have been resolved (Feigleman, 2000).

Since 2011, South Korean law made it possible for families to relinquish rights to a baby before birth. Therefore, a child could be placed in an adoptive home quickly after birth. This law was passed because 90% of adoptees were children born to unwed mothers (Ahn et al., 2017). Furthermore, the supporting rationale offered by Ahn et al. (2017) was that early placement would decrease problem behaviors. In South Korea among adopted children, problem behaviors increase if the child is older at the time of adoption (Ahn et al., 2017).

Biological or Adoptive Family

Fensbo (2001) cited that adoptive families did not function as well as biological families. Furthermore, a negative family environment contributed to the maladjustment of adoptees. They also stated that low self-esteem and confusion of self were negative psychological effects of adoption. Therefore, it has been suggested that professionals working with adoptive families emphasize the importance of communication concerning racial and ethnic differences to prevent adolescent delinquent behavior (Anderson et al., 2015). The intersection of family cohesiveness and agreement about racial and ethnic differences could provide support for the adoptee, thereby decreasing adolescent adjustment behavior problems. Families that were unable to reach an agreement about racial and ethnicity issues had adopted children with considerably more delinquent behaviors (Anderson et al., 2015).

Theme 4: Adoptive Family

Adoptive family issues include visual likeness, encouragement from adoptive parents (Langrehr et al., 2015; Lee, 2016), the importance of parents (Pinderhughes et al., 2015), color and color-blindness (Pinderhughes et al., 2015), and marginalization (Chang et al., 2017). The subthemes found in this main theme intersected with other subthemes found in the literature. For example, the subtheme of visual likeness appeared in other themes, such as ethnic identity exploration (Shiao & Tuan, 2008).

Visual Likeness

In their study, Hoffman and Peña (2013) reported that Korean adoptees expressed genuine love for their adoptive parents, but also stressed the need to have someone that looked like them. Korean adoptees recounted childhood memories of being taunted about the shape of their eyes by their school-aged peers. These experiences negatively singled out their physical features and gave the message that their ethnic difference was not good. Being raised in predominantly White families and neighborhoods, these individuals had limited opportunities to be around other Koreans who were either adopted or immigrants. Moreover, the individuals related moments of when they began a journey of realizing their Korean ethnicity because of going to culture camp or meeting another Korean or Asian person.

Encouragement

Some Korean adoptees were brought up in White families where exploration of their Korean culture was encouraged, whereas it was absent in others (Lee, 2016). According to Langrehr et al. (2015), adoptive family dynamics presented either challenges or continued support. Individuals replied that family relationships were detached, in progress, or consistently strong and positive. Those who reported a detached relationship expressed that they had trouble feeling close to the adoptive family, and some reported a severance from the family because of

their search for their birth family. The ones who reported that their relationship was in progress were working on building stronger family connections. Last, the individuals who reported a strong positive connection also shared that open communication about adoption helped them build family bonds (Langrehr et al., 2015).

Importance of Parents

Pinderhughes et al. (2015) concluded that parents of transracial adoptees play an important part during the middle school years for the cultural socialization of their child. Furthermore, parents' ethnic identity might relate to the support of their transracially adopted child. However, it was also cited that parents of Korean adoptees downplayed racial differences. Pinderhughes et al. (2015) showed family ethnic identity was a significant part of cultural socialization behaviors and their children's ethnic self-labels. Additionally, Beaupre et al. (2015) found that involvement of the mother resulted in Korean adoptees having a stronger commitment to ethnic identity, whereas perceived involvement of the father did not make a difference in whether there was a strong or weak commitment to ethnic identity.

Some parents of transnational adoptees encouraged their children to attend adoption camps to immerse their child in their birth culture (Baden, 2015; Brocious, 2014). Although these camps were a beginning for adoptees to explore their birth culture, the camps were short-term. Also, the focus of the camps included practical language skills, cultural information, and travel to the birth country (Godon et al., 2014).

Yoon (2001) found that parental support was associated with a positive sense of ethnic identity, which was described as a cluster of self-concepts identified as ethnic pride and negative image about ethnic origins. The author stressed the significance of parental support for positive relationships with and self-esteem of the adopted child. Although this subtheme—the importance

of parents—is found within the larger them of adoptive family, it also intersects in the major theme of psychological adjustment.

Color and Color-Blindness

Pinderhughes et al. (2015) stated color-blind attitudes could be likened to the rejection of racial differences. Additionally, most Korean adoptees were raised in color-blind homes. This was because social workers told adoptive parents to quickly assimilate the children into the family culture, which was predominately White culture (Palmer, 2010).

To examine parental racial socialization strategies and the perceived effects, Chang et al. (2017) used focus groups to collect narratives from 34 Korean adoptees. They found that parents were categorized as avoidant, ambivalent, or engaged. The behaviors of avoidant or ambivalent parents were displayed as lacking empathy or skills to deal with the adoptees' racial issues. The engaged parents were able to actively involve their child in socialization focused on cultural exposure. These parents were also able to actively participate in conversations about race and culture.

The participants in the study used the term color-blind to describe parents' ways to deal with racism. This approach related to the denial of being treated differently based on race. These strategies then fostered a tolerance of racism and feelings of marginalization in the adoptee. Further, the researchers stated that adoptees expressed frustration and isolation. These individuals were left to deal with racism without support or protection from their parents.

Racism and Marginalization

Feigleman (2000) suggested that Black and Asian children were most likely to face discrimination because of physical features. It was also noted that a significant finding was that location of residence had by far the most impact on the transracial child's adjustment. Those who lived in predominantly White neighborhoods reported higher discomfort about appearance than

those who lived in a racially diverse area. This finding is also substantiated by the findings of Kim et al. (2010) who concluded that Korean adoptees reported less tension over their appearance when they were raised in racially diverse communities.

Chang et al. (2017) stated that individuals in their study expressed feelings of marginalization growing up in predominantly White communities. In all eight focus groups, participants reported situations in which parents dismissed their racial experiences (Chang et al., 2017). Further, individuals in their study relayed incidents of being told by parents that they should be proud of their Korean culture. However, the parents did not give further encouragement or support for the individual to explore their birth culture. Participants also reported feelings of not being validated because they continued to be treated as White with little or no regard to their Korean identity.

Theme 5: Acceptance

This main theme of acceptance was interwoven throughout the other main themes and appeared as a subtheme. Adoptees were challenged to be accepted in family, immigrant Korean groups, and higher education settings. Furthermore, acceptance or rejection experiences contributed to Korean adoptees' perceptions of being different from others (Kim et al., 2010). Additionally, Samura (2016) found that Asian Americans had mixed feelings of acceptance and belonging on the college campus specific to their study. This is detailed in the main theme of university belonging.

Mohanty (2015) recognized that international transracial adoptees shared a common story of relinquishment by birth parents, loss of birth culture and country, and the experience of transracial placement. This placed them in a group differentiated from those who were seen as real immigrants. Also, Palmer (2010) identified that Korean adoptees experienced situations and feelings of not being accepted in "authentic" Korean groups.

Adoptees as Immigrants

Mohanty (2015) posited that because the immigration status of an adoptee was different from that of other immigrants, they may find themselves not being accepted by other minority groups. Further, international adoptees were found to be socialized into the culture of their adoptive parents. It was recognized that overemphasis of heritage could discount adoptive culture. Therefore, it was concluded that an overemphasis of either action could have negative effects.

Authentic Korean

Korean adoptees have also been faced with rejection by the Korean people. Palmer (2010) stated that Korean adoptees assimilated into White culture, which acted as an impediment to their acceptance as an authentic Korean. It was noted that adoptees who returned to Korea were not viewed as Korean because of their White acculturation. Additionally, Palmer (2010) recognized diversity and tensions within the Korean adoptee community. Divisions were related to age and age at adoption, biracial and multiracial status, and elitism.

Theme 6: Psychological Adjustment

Ethnic identity and psychological adjustment appeared to be intersecting themes. This was substantiated by Basow et al. (2008), Beaupre et al. (2015), Feigleman (2000), Ferrari et al. (2015), and Yoon (2001). These authors separately concluded that positive identity development supported psychological well-being. Schwekendiek (2019) suggested that the mental health status of Korean adoptees was ignored by adoption policymakers. However, Lee (2016) found that most Korean adoptees demonstrated psychological resilience despite prominent adverse experiences.

Ethnic Socialization and Identity Commitment

Beaupre et al. (2015) used psychological adjustment measures to test the ethnic and adoptive identity profiles of adolescent Korean adoptees. These researchers stated that less ethnic socialization was found to be related to less commitment to identifying as Korean by adoptees and more socialization was found to be related to more committed identity. This idea also intersected with positive psychological adjustment and acceptance of status as an adoptee.

These researchers cited that most Korean adoptees were placed in American families at early ages and had low rates of disabilities, which may have accounted for a better psychological adjustment (Beaupre et al., 2015). Additionally, individuals who were less committed to their identity had significantly less satisfaction with life than those who were strongly committed. It was also recognized that the importance of possessing a White or national identity might serve as an important role in self-concept. However, they cautioned that the exploration of ethnic and adoptive identity could become more prominent as individuals moved from adolescence into adulthood. Overall, they concluded from their study that Korean adolescents were, on average, positively adjusted.

Positive Parent-Child Relationship

Yoon (2001) posited that a positive relationship between adoptive parents and their adopted child would be instrumental in the adoptees' development of identity. It was suggested that a positive relationship was identified as the sharing of ethnic socialization experiences. Other observed variables were positive well-being, distress, personal self-esteem, distress, personal self-esteem, ethnic pride, direct support of ethnic background, indirect support of ethnic background, warmth, and positive communication.

Participants of Yoon's (2001) study were from a sample of 800 adolescent Korean adoptees who had been identified through Holt International Children's Services. They reported

241 completed surveys, which was a 30% response rate. Data from the adoptees and their parents were gathered by the use of a survey. The average of the respondent was 14 and the majority reported having no mental problems. Also, most of the adoptive parents responded as being White and most had a high level of education.

Yoon (2001) concluded that psychological adjustment was positively correlated to a positive parent-child relationship regarding intercountry adopted children. This finding supported the idea that being adopted would not result in a negative development of identity. Yoon (2001) strongly suggested that parental support of ethnic socialization was affiliated with positive feelings of ethnic identity. These findings indicated a negative sense of ethnic identity could represent a weakness of psychological failure to cope. The hypothesis of collective self-esteem and direct effect on psychological adjustment was supported by the results. Yoon concluded that positive parent-child relationships were causal in the development of collective self-esteem (2001). Therefore, psychological problems were less likely to occur provided the adoptee had greater self-esteem.

Mental Health

Schwekendiek (2019) discussed the implications of data from the Korean Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Family Affairs survey from 2008. On the survey, 49% of Korean adoptees from a sample of 283 participants reported that they received psychotherapy at some time, with 8% reporting that their treatment was frequent. Further, it was found that transracial adoptees had a suicide rate four times higher than nonadopted peers. The author argued that the maladjustment of Korean adoptees could be blamed on their placement in predominantly White environments mainly in the Midwestern United States. These locations proved to be areas of isolation for the Korean adoptee because they lived apart from other Korean and Asian populations.

As Korean adoptees grow into adulthood, it was noted that they move from their rural environments and find connections with other ethnic Koreans (Schwekendiek, 2019). It was noted that even though some adoptees were angry about being raised in predominantly White environments in which the individuals were victims of teasing, stereotyping, and racism. In contrast, there was also a large population of adoptees that had positive experiences. While it was recognized that 49% of adoptees had received counseling, Schwekendiek also noted that approximately half and not received any such type of services. Schwekendiek concluded that Korean adoptee social maladjustment and other welfare issues were ignored by international adoption policymakers (2019).

In Feigelman's longitudinal study (2000), data indicated that 55% of all parents surveyed stated that counseling had been sought for the adoptees' emotional or behavioral problems. This evidence solidified the need of mental health services for adoptees and their parents. Also, it was reported that school expulsions were of significance and that male adoptees were more likely to have problems than females.

Theme 7: College or University Experiences

As Korean adoptees and other transracially or internationally adopted individuals enter higher education, college and university experiences have been noted by researchers as a growing area of examination (Gummadam et al., 2016; Yeo et al., 2019). Researchers recognized that Asian students encountered mistaken identity (Yeo et al., 2019), the model minority myth (Wing, 2007), and a need to balance two worlds (Suda & Hartlep, 2016). Students also faced challenges in finding university belonging (Gummadam et al., 2016) and meaningful student services (Wong & Buckner, 2008) that were suited to Asian Americans.

Mistaken Identity

Yeo et al. (2019) used narratives of Asian American students to examine experiences with racial microaggressions based on mistaken identity. Often, Asian students and Asian immigrant students have been identified as one group on higher education campuses. Because of their physical features, this student population is placed in a category of being "them" by their non-Asian counterparts. They further stated that Asian students, in general, faced greater racial microaggressions, including the belief that all Asians were the same.

Through their findings, Yeo et al. (2019) identified themes that targeted Asian American students based on mistaken identity. These included xenophobia, mockery of English accents and Asian languages, and attribution of intelligence, feeling being alienated in their own land, victims of stereotypes based on race, homogenization, and monolithic categorization. Students reported hearing remarks that there were too many Asians on their campus. Some participants stated that other students asked if they could speak English. It was also assumed they were smart because they were Asian. The researchers found that students felt "pressured and insulted at being judged through stereotypes" (2019, p. 54). Furthermore, they suggested that stereotypes based on false concepts between race and intelligence were harmful to both Asian American students and Asian international students.

These researchers recognized patterns that Asian American students continually encountered racial microaggressions because they were mistaken for being international students, and also because they were Asian American. Participants in their study reported being targeted with words, such as "international," "mistaken," "lumped," "go back," "China/India/Asia/country," "language," "English," and "accent" (p. 48). Furthermore, they found that Asian American students dealt with views that only Whites were Americans. Asian American participants in their study voiced instances in which they experienced social pressures

to act more like their White peers. It was concluded that the mostly White domestic students in their study unconsciously or consciously viewed Asian International and Asian American students through a racialized lens. Consequently, because domestic students had mistakenly identified Asian Americans as international Asians, the Asian American individuals were recipients of microaggressions (Yeo et al., 2019).

Model Minority Myth

Since the 1990s, the model minority myth has been used to label Asian students as overachievers (Wing, 2007). Additionally, Wing (2007) posited that the use of the model minority stereotype had been politicized to criticize and discredit people of color. To challenge beliefs of the model minority myth, Wing (2007) conducted a study of Asian American students in a racially integrated high school. Through qualitative and quantitative measures, data were collected from six high school participants. These individuals reported being from Viet Nam, Laos, Thailand, China, and Japan. The themes surrounding the model myth found in this study were that all Asian students were high academic achievers, out-performed White students, and naturally excelled at math. In addition, that all Asian families highly value education, were alike in culture, language, appearance, and academic achievement, and did not suffer racial discrimination like other people of color. Through the narratives of the participants, Wing (2007) suggested that explanations for Asian academic high performance were dependent on socioeconomic class, historical and political circumstances, immigration status, English language skills, lack of opportunities for social and economic mobility outside of school, voluntary or involuntary minority status, and other interrelated structural, social, and cultural factors. Because Asians are mistakenly seen as having the advantage due to the model minority myth, there are members of this population that live in poverty with no available social or educational services (Wing, 2007). Although the sample of this study is from a high school, it is significant to the

field of higher education because high school students need student services as they enter college.

Balance of Two Worlds

In their study, Suda and Hartlep (2016) claimed that transracially adopted Asian American college students perceived themselves to be an invisible population as compared to peers. This perception affected students' ability to find their niche on the college campus. The study contained the themes of racism, marginalization, and microaggressions as perceived and experienced by transracially adopted students.

Participants of their study voiced concerns that institutions of higher learning did not know how to support this exceptional population of individuals. Additionally, they stated that transracial adoptees who tried to enter White spaces, such as college fraternities, sometimes encountered microaggressions and push back against others who seemed to possess White privilege. This was due to not being part of the visible White race as perceived by peers. Also, some adoptees experienced being told that they "spoke good English," when they had been raised in the United States.

The term *fraudulent* was used by Suda and Hartlep (2016) to describe the possible feeling that individuals may have experienced when they tried to find a place within Asian-American space. Although transracial adoptees looked Asian, they might not be accepted by Asians who were raised within their own culture. Further, it was suggested that Asian-American adoptees felt as though they were not accepted when they were in circumstances concerning birth culture. The researchers reported that participants believed the existing issues they experienced were due to the lack of institutional support as a result of not understanding minority populations. Further, they raised the question of whether or not student affairs practitioners were showing

microaggressions by expecting students to embody a culture in which society perceives them to belong.

University Belonging

It was suggested by Gummadam et al. (2016) that a sense of belonging at a university was connected to ethnic minority students' psychological adjustment. To test their argument, they conducted a qualitative study using surveys to collect data from 322 participants enrolled in an introductory psychology class at a Midwestern university. In addition to demographic information, students were asked questions relating to school belonging, ethnic identity, self-competence and self-worth, and depressive symptoms. An interpretation of the data revealed no significant difference among ethnic groups on school belonging, depressive symptoms, scholastic competence, or social acceptance. However, there was a significant difference between ethnic groups in ethnic identity, global self-worth, the family standard of living, and generation status. It was discovered on average, that African Americans responded with stronger ethnic identity and lower family standard of living than Asian Americans. Further, Asian Americans had significantly lower global self-worth than African Americans or Hispanic Americans. Last, African Americans had the highest generational status, which meant their families had been in the United States for a longer time. From the resulting data, the researchers concluded that a sense of school belonging at the university level was associated with minority college students' psychological adjustment. Further, ethnic identity was not strongly correlated to psychological adjustment when deliberated in tandem with a sense of school belonging. However, the absence of a strong sense of belonging revealed a link between ethnic identity and self-worth.

The idea that strong feelings of ethnic group belonging could serve as protection for minority students who did not have strong feelings of school belonging was posited by

Gummadam et al. (2016). They further recognized that ethnic composition on college campuses had been found to facilitate connections between ethnic identity and psychological adjustment. Therefore, levels of diversity found on college campuses could affect the association between ethnic identity and psychological outcomes. Although this study included Asian Americans, there was no specific mention of Korean-born adoptees.

Samura (2016) examined of how Asian students negotiated the physical and social spaces of higher education. Data were gathered from semistructured interviews and participant photo journals from a sample of 36 students. Individuals were asked to take pictures of things, people, and places that were of personal significance. Through the data, Samura (2016) found that Asian students encountered social and academic spaces they did not feel part of and felt a lack of fit, different, judged, or out of place. Further, Samura (2016) concluded that students were involved in a process of fitting into these identified spaces. Students had used strategies, such as remaking or repositioning themselves and remaking space. All three of these strategies increased students' sense of belonging.

Meaningful Student Services

Samura (2016) stated that Asians are seen as being overrepresented on college campuses, yet they are an underserved population. This could also be connected with the findings of Wing (2007), who stated that Asian students at a high school campus felt invisible and insignificant. Therefore, the importance of meaningful student services could help validate students' in their academic experiences.

Wong and Buckner (2008) researched the delivery of meaningful services by higher education staff for multiracial populations. They collected case study qualitative data from the multiracial student service programs of three universities. Services for multiracial students

ranged from formal staff support for student leadership within organizations, supervised student program planning, and mostly staff involvement with some student leadership.

The strongest demonstration of multiracial student services took place at the university, where students planned programs to "raise cultural awareness, promote ethnic pluralism, facilitate community building, and provide assistance with college transition" (p. 48). Students at this university had planned a week of events that included panel discussions on transracial adoption, art exhibits, and a keynote speaker. The organization had partnered with other student organizations and garnered collaborative efforts from multiracial faculty and co-curricular departments. Because of these collaborative student-led efforts, the delivery of services appeared to be effective. However, another institution had expressed that earlier efforts to implement student services for multiracial students had not succeeded due to isolation and a lack of alliances with other campus organizations.

Wong and Buckner (2008) concluded that formal appointments of professional staff serving the multiracial student populations could benefit such groups by way of advocacy, engaging dialogue, and student-based service. They further posited that strong student leadership can provide the platform for needed advocacy and dialogue. Additionally, other recognized services for multiracial students included student outreach, multiracial discussion groups, mixed-race awareness months or weeks, and multiracial adoptee panels (Wong & Buckner, 2008).

Ethnic Identity Theory

Ethnic identity theory was defined as a person's identification as belonging to an ethnic group and that their thinking, perceptions, feelings, and behaviors would be influenced as a result of membership (Phinney & Rotherham, 1987). Phinney and Alpuria (1987) found that individual and past experiences were important to ethnic development and self-esteem among minority undergraduate students. They argued that White adolescents did not have a need to question

ethnicity because they grew up in a culture that mirrored White values and standards. Minority adolescents were presented with greater challenges regarding identity because they were born and raised in their family culture, exposed to the majority culture, and also measured by the standards of the majority culture regarding their appearance and cultural characteristics.

Attachment Theory

The conceptual framework of attachment theory is based on observations of human interactions. Attachments are formed when the caregiver is available to the dependent child. Availability is contingent on accessibility and responsiveness of the attachment figure (Bowlby, 1973). Individuals' construct models of their environment and identify who their attachment figures are. They also develop perceptions of how acceptable or unacceptable they are to their attachment figures. Building upon these constructs, the child is able to predict how accessible and responsive the attachment figures will be and if they can be relied upon for support.

Attachment was understood by Bowlby (1969, 1982) to be the connection of caregiving between a mother and her child. He posited that physical contact, such as clinging, was important for attachment formation. Bowlby (1973) suggested that detachment could indefinitely continue due to prolonged repeated separation during the first three years of life. Shorter separations could result in the child display behaviors ranging from ambivalence, hostility, or defiance toward the parents. If a child was separated for a long time, their feelings became indifferent and place of family belonging seemed to disappear.

Infants and children were recognized as being able to experience grief because of separation (Bowlby, 1980). Children as young as 12 months to three years of age were observed during prolonged separation from their mothers. The children would cry, throw themselves around, and look with hope for anything that might signal the return of their mother. After days of separation, the child would continue longing for their mother but became withdrawn and

exhibited signs of despair and depression. It was once believed that children and infants did not experience grief. Bowlby (1980) suggested that childhood grief was observed as being present and not short-lived. He further purported that children who experienced feelings of being unwanted by their parents also believed that they were unwanted by anyone. Children who grew up feeling loved and wanted by their parents would then also believe that others would find them [the individual] as being loveable and wanted.

Vectors of Student Identity

(Chickering's (1969, 1972) seven vectors of student development theory was formulated to understand how students develop during their time in college. These seven vectors are competence, emotions, autonomy, interpersonal relationships, development of purpose, identity, and integrity. Students attending college develop three different types of competence that include intellectual competence, physical competence, and manual skills. Intellectual competence was recognized by Chickering as skills to master content and attain refined intellectual abilities (1969, 1972). College students were also observed learning skills for emotional management. Being able to regulate emotions was important for students to navigate college life and learn to use anxiety as motivation to perform. While in college, students learned how to become interdependent and realized that relationships with parents and others created a balance to being autonomous.

Establishing identity was dependent on competence, emotional maturity, autonomy, and positive relationships. This vector had seven subcomponents that included comfort with body image, comfort with gender and sexual orientation, sense of self in social, historical, and cultural context, clarity of self in role and life, sense of self in response to feedback from others, self-acceptance, and stability. Chickering (1969, 1972) also supported the idea that family of origin and ethnic traditions affected the identity development of students.

Development of purpose for college students was the ability to be intentional in the formation of goals and future plans. Developing integrity was related to identity formation and clarity of purpose. It was apparent that identity was dependent upon the development of the other six vectors.

Summary

In this literature review, I presented seven salient themes related to transracial and international Korean adoptees. The complexity of adoption was addressed in which main themes intersected with subthemes throughout the literature. The themes included:

(a) ethnic identity (Hoffman & Peña, 2013; Hu et al., 2017; Hubbinette, 2007; Shiao & Tuan, 2008: Witenstein & Saito, 2015),

 (b) attachment and bonding (Swartz et al., 2012; Pylypa, 2016),

(c) behavior (Ahn et al., 2017; Fensbo, 2003),

(d) adoptive family (Kreider & Raleigh, 2016; Lee, 2016; Pinderhughes et al., 2015),

(e) acceptance (Mohanty, 2015),

(f) psychological adjustment (Boivin & Hassan, 2015; Yoon, 2001),

(g) college or university experience (Gummadam et al., 2016; Suda & Hartlep, 2016; Wing, 2007; Wong & Buckner, 2008; Yeo et al., 2019).

I based the theoretical framework on ethnic identity theory (Phinney & Rotherham, 1987), attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1982), and Chickering's vectors of student development theory (1969, 1972).

Through this literature review, I found a dearth of information concerning the connection of birth culture, adopted culture, and adopted family to the Korean adoptees' pursuit of higher education attainment. In Chapter 3, I give descriptions concerning the methodology of the

present study, participants, procedure, materials, data analysis, limitations, delimitations, and the

role of the researcher.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the perceptions of identity and attachment in regards to higher education from a sample of 14 Korean adoptees raised in the Midwestern United States. This study was based on three research questions:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of Korean adoptees regarding connection to birth culture in their pursuit of higher education?

RQ2: What are the perceptions and lived experiences of Korean adoptees regarding connection to adopted culture in their pursuit of a degree in higher education?

RQ3: What are the perceptions and lived experiences of Korean adoptees regarding connection to their adopted families in their pursuit of a degree in higher education?

In this chapter I present the research methodology and the rationale for qualitative research. I also describe participants, procedures, materials, analysis, and synthesis of data. Also in this chapter I discuss trustworthiness, limitations, delimitations, assumptions, the role of the researcher, and offer a disclosure statement.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative researchers seek to understand phenomena using how and why questions (Yin, 2018). Further, according to Stake (1995), qualitative research is the search for happenings and also for understanding interrelationships. Additionally, qualitative research allows for individual cases to be treated within their context and strives to institute deeper and more compassionate comprehension through thick description. Terrell (2016) described thick description as the researched details that add validity to a study.

Through qualitative research, questions investigate patterns of expected or unexpected connections (Stake, 1995). Moreover, qualitative research is a form of inquiry that is emergent, inductive, and evolutionary (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Saldaña and Omasta (2018) further

suggested that qualitative inquiry is a learn-as-you-go approach, because understanding and mastery are obtained over time along with experience. These authors also stated that instead of depending on statistical measurements, qualitative research relies mainly on words and images. Through qualitative research, an examination can take place of "what people do, say, feel, and create" (p. 144).

Case Study Research

Stake (1995) asserted that qualitative case study researchers are tasked with preserving the many realities of what happens. Furthermore, Stake presented case study as being "noninterventive and empathic" (1995, p. 12). Through case study, the researcher seeks to understand how the individuals of the study see things (Stake, 1995).

Case study research meets the need of researchers to understand phenomena that take place within social situations (Yin, 2018). Because of the exceptionality of an individual or because the case is one of several that can be compared or combined with other cases, this method is worth examination (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

Rationale for Case Study Methodology

Based on theories of ethnic identity (Phinney & Rotherham, 1987) and attachment (Bowlby, 1969, 1982), the purpose of this study was to examine how South Korean adoptees' perceptions of lived experiences regarding connection to birth culture, adopted culture, and attachment to adopted families influenced their pursuit of a degree in higher education. The present study was about a particular population, which aligned with being a bounded system. Stake (1995) stated that case study has been referred to as a *bounded system*, which is best suited to study programs and people, rather than events or processes. Further, case study methodology was most appropriate for this study because it permitted *how* and *why* questions to be answered

while also allowing me to view how settings influenced phenomenon (Yin, 2018; Baxter & Jack, 2008). Additionally, Yin (2018) stated that

> Whatever your field of interest, the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena. Case studies allow you to focus in-depth on a "case" and to retain a holistic and real-world perspective—such as in studying individual life cycles, small group behavior, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, school performance, international relations, and the maturation of industries. (p. 5)

The population for this present study included individuals from the unique group of Korean adoptees. This topic was well-aligned to case study, because I sought to examine how attachment and identity influenced individuals' pursuits of higher education.

Case Study Design

Case study research design was noted by Yin (2018) as being especially important. The steps included (a) a case study question, (b) any proposition(s), (c) case(s), (d) logic linking data to the proposition, and (e) criteria for an interpretation of the findings. This method is linear and iterative (Yin, 2018) and involves planning, designing, preparation, collection, analyzing, and sharing. For this study, the purpose was to examine how lived experiences of ethnic identity and attachment were perceived among South Korean adoptees in their pursuit of higher education. The case study proposal involved South Korean-born adoptees who were raised in the Midwestern United States and had graduated from a Midwestern four-year institution between 1987 and 2017.

Participants

For this study, 14 South Korean transnational adoptees were invited to participate out of a response of 87 individuals. There were two men and 12 women. These individuals met the

following requirements: (a) they were South Korean-born adoptees, (b) they grew up in the Midwestern United States, and (c) they graduated from a Midwestern four-year institution between 1987 and 2017. These three aspects bound the case, determined the scope of data collection, and distinguished phenomenon and context (Yin, 2018). Because the majority of South Korean adoptee children were sent to the Midwest (Kim, 2010), this was the geographical location I chose for the study.

Procedures

Informed Consent and Ethical Considerations

Approval for the proposed study was granted from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Abilene Christian University (ACU) before data collection. Volunteer individuals were recruited through groups identifying as Korean Adoptees (KADS) on Facebook. I posted a question in one group asking for help on a project. Responding individuals were asked to respond via private message to protect their identity. Yin (2018) stated the importance of ethical practices involving human subjects and protecting them from harm. Additionally, the Belmont Report (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979) established boundaries between medical practice and biomedical research. Further, it acknowledged that human research should be guided by ethics of respect, beneficence, and justice.

Relevant to the Belmont Report, considerations for this study included ethical actions. Based on the information provided from the OREC (2019) training, an informed consent form was written using appropriate and comprehensive language. The informed consent form followed the 11 steps presented in the training and included the following:

(a) statement that labeled the study as research;

(b) explanation of the research and an invitation to participate with explanation why the individual received an invitation;

(c) description of the procedures;

(d) description of foreseeable risks or discomforts and steps to minimize them;

(e) description of benefits to participant or others that may benefit from the research;

(f) disclosure of any appropriate alternative procedures that may be to the participants' advantage;

(g) description of how records would be kept confidential;

(h) if there was more than minimal risk, an explanation and description and availability of any compensation and any medical treatments, who to contact if a research-related injury occurs, and where to access more information;

(i) information of who to contact about the research and the information of the primary investigator (PI);

(j) statement that the research was voluntary and refusal to participate or withdraw would involve no penalty;

(k) statement that indicated the decision of the individual to participate and their signature that indicated their decision to participate.

All participants chose to receive the informed consent form via email and signed the form electronically. After I received the form, I signed and dated it electronically. I then returned it to the participant for their records.

Selection of Participants

There were 84 responses to the invitation posted on the social media site. If individuals indicated a willingness to participate, they were asked to contact me via private message. The first qualifying question was if the individual had grown up in the Midwest. The second qualifying question was if they had attended a four-year institution in the Midwest. If they answered "yes" to both questions, they were sent an email with the informed consent form and

the letter to participate. There were 14 responses that included 2 male respondents and 12 female respondents. Four individuals had moved to other parts of the United States in coastal regions. The majority of participants, 10 of the 14, chose to stay in the Midwest after graduating from their four-year institution.

Materials

Case study data can be collected through interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts (Terrell, 2016). For this qualitative case study, materials used to gather data included interviews and digital journals. Twenty questions were formulated related to the research questions. I conducted interviews through an online meeting source and securely stored all the data electronically. Interviews ranged in length from 40 minutes to over an hour. I transcribed the interviews in notebooks by hand and then typed and electronically uploaded them to the appropriate ACU Dissertation IRB Course Module. All participants were provided with a copy of the interview transcript for review. Some chose to respond, while others did not respond in recognition of receipt.

Analysis and Synthesis of Data

First, each research question was written on a flip chart with the corresponding interview questions. Next, after I transcribed the interviews, I analyzed and deconstructed each interview. I then categorized the data gleaned from the participants' interview comments through in vivo coding (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). The data of each interview involved listing the experiences of each participant on a separate piece of paper. Next, I placed the coded responses on the charts next to the corresponding questions. The data were continually reorganized to bring about patterns of themes for synthesis to take place. I made notes on the charts for cross-checking of data. Common codes were grouped for deduction and categorization, and I inserted detailed quotes from participants as part of presenting the findings.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative study requires trustworthiness, which includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Terrell (2016) stated credibility was when a study could be deemed as believable from the perspective of the participants (p. 174). This could be accomplished through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, use of peer debriefers, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member checking.

Credibility

For this study, credibility was established through prolonged engagement of the interview and follow-up conversations. Additionally, triangulation was implemented through a review of journals. Member checking was utilized as a third aspect of credibility. I gave a copy of the interview transcript for them to check for accuracy.

Transferability

Transferability was described by Terrell (2016) as a demonstration that the findings of a study could be applied to other settings. Also, the use of thick description can further support transferability. For this study, I provided thick description by using the participants' own words to describe their life experiences. The findings of this present study could be applied to situations of other transracial adoptees separated from their birth culture and birth family.

Dependability

Terrell (2016) likened dependability to quantitative reliability and the ability for a study to be replicated. This study could be replicated by other researchers who follow the procedures of this study. I also kept memos of data analyzation and maintained records of charts and notebooks.

Confirmability

A study has confirmability when the researcher can show how the results were solely

influenced by the participants with no outside influence. For this present study, I discussed and examined the findings with the appointed dissertation chair.

Limitations

Limitations were the sample size of only 14 participants. Further, there was an unequal balance of gender with 12 female participants and only 2 male participants. Also, the university locations only included those the adoptees attended in the Midwest. The span of 30 years of the lived experiences of the adoptees could be considered a limitation due to social influences of the decades. Another limitation could have been the willingness or ability of the participants to be truly transparent during the interview process. Additionally, the study was limited because it only gathered data from Korean adoptees who graduated from a four-year college or university.

Delimitations

Delimitations were described by Terrell (2016) as the established boundaries or limitations for a study so there could be a specific focus on the problem. This case study focused on Korean adoptees and their perceptions of attachment and identity in their connection to birth culture, adoptive culture, and adoptive family and how these factors influenced their pursuit of a degree in higher education. Other delimitations included location, time of graduation from college or university, and being a Korean adoptee raised in White families with middle- to upper middle-class status.

Assumptions

Terrell (2016) defined assumptions as "the characteristics of a data set we assume to be true prior to using a given statistical procedure" (p. 255), but that "cannot be verified" (p. 41). In the present, study assumptions were that the participants were being truthful about their experiences and perceptions related to the connection of birth culture, adoptive culture, and adoptive family in their pursuit of degree attainment in higher education. It was also assumed

that participants had already established their ethnic identity, which would have influenced self-perceptions related to the questions about birth culture, adoptive culture, and adoptive family.

It was assumed that knowledge of birth culture would not affect the participants' decisions to pursue higher education. Second, it was assumed that adoptive culture would have an impact on the Korean adoptee to pursue higher education. Third, it was assumed that adoptive parents would have an active role in motivating their Korean adopted child to attend college.

Role of the Researcher

According to Terrell (2016), the role of the qualitative researcher is to submerge themselves in the process of data collection; because the researcher was the agent of data gathering, it was necessary for them to be directly involved. Terrell (2016) further stated that qualitative research was performed from an emic perspective, which requires the researcher to be within the environment they are studying to have an inside view. Moreover, it was important to remain nonbiased in the gathering, analysis, and reporting of the data.

Disclosure Statement

It was important to disclose that I am a Korean adoptee who grew up in the predominantly White rural Midwestern United States. It was my goal to examine issues surrounding adoption, ethnic identity, and issues of attachment, and the effects on degree attainment in higher education. Also, it was my desire that the results of this qualitative case study would assist families, policymakers, higher education leaders, and student service practitioners in making beneficial decisions for the growth and development of Korean adoptees.

Summary

This chapter presented an overall description of this study's research methodology. I chose a qualitative research design for this study because it was best-suited for understanding how and why questions and understanding interrelationships (Yin, 2018). Also, I employed a

case study to preserve realities of what happened in the lives of the participants (Stake, 1995).

Ethical considerations were given with an included list of details for the informed consent form

that was given to participants. Specifications were given for participants, for procedures, and for

methods for establishing trustworthiness. My intent in this study was to gain understanding of

how identity and attachment among Korean adoptees influenced their pursuit of higher education

and degree attainment. Additionally, I hope the results will help guide future adopting families,

policymakers, higher education leaders, and student service practitioners in making beneficial

decisions for the growth and development of Korean adoptees.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine how South Korean adoptees' perceptions of lived experiences regarding connection to their birth culture, adopted culture, and how attachment to adopted families influenced their pursuit of higher education. In this chapter I reported the study findings as organized by the categories that emerged from the interviews and the themes that evolved as the participants shared their life experiences. The specific original research questions were the following:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of Korean adoptees regarding connection to birth culture in their pursuit of higher education?

RQ2: What are the perceptions and lived experiences of Korean adoptees regarding connection to adopted culture in their pursuit of a degree in higher education?

RQ3: What are the perceptions and lived experiences of Korean adoptees regarding connection to their adopted families in their pursuit of a degree in higher education?

The 20 semistructured interview questions (Appendix A) were designed to uncover connections between perceptions of birth culture, adopted culture, and adopted family in the participants' pursuit of degrees in higher education. Participants had the flexibility to talk as much as they needed to explain their points of view. A requirement for this study was that participants had to have been raised in the Midwestern United States. Another requirement was that they had attended a four-year institution of higher learning in the Midwest. The number of participants from each Midwestern state are listed in Table 1.

The main categories in this study were perceptions and feelings of attachment to birth culture, adoptive family attachment, stereotypes, and the complexities of Korean or White identity. The categories included emergent themes such as feelings of disconnection

within their adoptive families, expectations, assimilation, and reclaiming Korean identity. Also, there were underlying subthemes, which included fear of abandonment by the adoptive family and gratefulness for being adopted. Participants who voiced a desire to reclaim Korean identity had also visited Korea or had met members of their birth family. The themes and subthemes intersected within the categories.

Table 1

Midwestern State in Which the Participant Was Raised

Midwestern State	n
Illinois	1
Iowa	3
Kansas	1
Michigan	2
Minnesota	2
Missouri	1
Nebraska	2
Wisconsin	2

Participants are listed in Table 2 by their assigned pseudonym, highest degree attainment, and field of study. The interviews took place from the middle of April 2020 to the first week in May 2020. This was during the shutdown and shelter in-place mandates in the United States because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the participants expressed their ample amount of time to take part in the interview process.

Table 2

Participants

Participant	Degree	Field of Study
Frank	Ph.D.	Science
Miles	B.S.	Political Science
Lehn	B.S.	Business
Maria	B.S.	Business/Management
Colleen	B.S.	Business/Management
Suzzette	M.A.	Social Work
Nancy	M.A.	Ethnic/Women's Studies
Millie	M.A.	Organizational Leadership
Molly	B.S.	Nursing
Jinna	M.A.	School Administration
Tina	B.S.	Biology
Alyssa	B.A.	Fashion Merchandising
Keeley	B.S.	Nursing
Caren	Ph.D.	Musical Arts

Some participants chose to share their written journals. Also, some chose to participate in a follow-up discussion as shown in Table 3. Their additional information was also included in the results. The participants who had responded after the member check request had agreed with the accuracy of the transcript that had been sent to them via email. One individual sent additional writing after checking their transcript.

Table 3

Individuals Who Shared Journals and Participated in Follow-Up Discussion

Participant	Shared Journal	Follow-up Discussion	Member Check
Frank	Yes	Yes	Yes
Miles	No	No	No
Lehn	No	No	No
Maria	No	Yes	Yes
Colleen	No	No	No
Suzzette	No	Yes	Yes
Nancy	No	Yes	Yes
Millie	Yes	No	Yes
Molly	No	No	No
Jina	Yes	No	Yes
Tina	Yes	No	Yes
Keeley	No	Yes	Yes
Caren	Yes	Yes	Yes
Alyssa	Yes	Yes	Yes

Perceptions and Feelings of Attachment to Birth Culture

There were three main themes relevant to participants' perceptions and feelings surrounding their Korean birth culture. The three perceived themes were limited knowledge, positive perceptions, and negative perceptions. All 14 participants stated that their perceptions and feelings toward their birth culture had been influenced by their adoptive parents.

Limited Perception

Six participants reported their perception of Korean birth culture was limited while they were growing up. Four of the six stated that although their parents had provided opportunities for them to go to Korean culture camps, they still felt limited in their knowledge of the culture. However, as they grew into adulthood, all stated that they had a deeper interest to learn more about birth culture. Five of the six shared that they had gone back to visit Korea as adults. Also, two participants had taken an opportunity to teach in Korea. Three individuals had one or more adopted siblings. Two were the only adopted person alongside biological siblings and one was an

only child. Also, one participant was contacted by her birth family, which was the reason for her visit to Korea in the spring of 2019.

Although the parents sent Keeley and her adopted brother to culture camp, her interest was minimal:

My parents were like, "you had no interest" because what kid wants to sit in a church all summer and learn Korean. I have a younger brother who's adopted through Holt here in the Midwest and they took us to some culture camps, but I do not remember most of them.

Keeley also stated that she did not have a "strong understanding or connection to Korean culture . . . and just until very recently, within the last year or so, I have decided I've been called to really dig into that [Korean culture]."

Concerning limited perception of birth culture, Miles stated the following:

Growing up I had minimal exposure to Korean culture. My parents sent me to culture camps, so that's where most of my knowledge came from. Back in the '90s, there wasn't much talk about Korea in American popular culture. So it was kind of limited to what I gleaned from the culture camps, getting highlights, food, and those sorts of things. I didn't have strong perceptions about what Korean society was like.

Jinna shared, "I really didn't have any knowledge of Korea when I was growing up." Although her parents encouraged attendance at culture camp, she didn't have an interest so they didn't push her. When Jinna went to college, she met other Asian Americans and a group of Korean adoptees. Meeting and interacting with these other individuals motivated her to learn more about her birth culture.

Suzzette's limited perception was evident in her conversation:

Regrettably, I have limited knowledge of my birth culture. Growing up in my large

family, my parents were of the generation where you . . . they were instructed to treat

their adopted children like their biological children so the cultural differences . . . there

was not a lot of value placed on that and it was not any fault of their own.

Maria was a participant who also said that her knowledge of birth culture was limited.

She said, "Relationship to my birth culture was limited. My parents did the best that they could.

We didn't really celebrate anything Korean as a family, not that they were opposed, but I don't

think my parents knew how to."

Positive Perception

Five participants had positive views or felt an attachment to their Korean birth culture.

All five of these individuals had one or more adopted siblings from China or Korea. Two of the

individuals visited Korea as adults. One individual was contacted by her biological father and

went to visit him in Korea. Also, he brought his present family to the United States to visit the

participant and her family. They have established a relationship with him and his family.

Molly stated her parents had supportive opinions of her birth parents. This helped her to

have a positive view of Korea:

Growing up, my parents always talked very highly about my birth parents. It was never

like, "you're abandoned." It was always, "your birth mother and father loved you so

much and they knew they couldn't provide for you in the way that they wanted so they

were willing to give you to a family who could." I feel like that was a very selfless act on

her [birth mother] part to do that.

Lehn was adopted into a family with an adopted brother from Korea and a younger

biological sister. As an adult she visited Korea to meet her birth family. As a result she

developed a stronger attachment to her birth culture. She stated:

I would say that now that I've met my birth family and I've been to Korea, that maybe I

have a slightly higher attachment than I did before. But, honestly, I don't know that I

would say that I have a really strong attachment. I don't feel it is as much as it maybe

should be. But, I don't know really know what that is.

Alyssa was raised in a family with two other Korean adopted siblings. She said that her

parents tried to instill a little bit of the culture and "it was really important that we had some kind

of interaction." Their parents encouraged Alyssa and her siblings to have interaction with other

Korean adoptees.

As a young child, Colleen shared that she was protective of being Korean:

I'd always been very curious about my heritage and culture and where I came from. I

always felt so protective of [birth culture] it when I was younger. Like if you said

anything bad about the Asian population in general or any stereotype . . . even if it wasn't

Korean. I was one of three Asian kids in my class so I would get a lot of different rice

references. And I just remember hearing that and I would get so mad . . . so getting teased

and jokes like that I would take personally. I felt very protective of it.

Although Colleen talked about her protective feelings, she also stated, "I have no idea why I felt

very protective of it."

One participant, Tina, was adopted to a White father and a Korean immigrant mother.

Her positive perception of Korean birth culture had been shaped by having a Korean-born

mother:

I think I was to a degree of course influenced by the Korean culture. She [mother] was a

first-generation immigrant too because she had never lived in the States until her

generation; like her early-mid-20s. And so whether it was food or the drive to do better in

another country [it] was something that was always put upon me and my brother, who

was adopted, not blood related, but he was also a Korean adoptee. That was always

impressed upon . . . by her to us, to always achieve more in this country.

Her statement provided insight into the influences of her Korean-born mother. The ideals and

goals of accomplishment were prominent in her adoptive family.

Negative Perceptions

Three participants had negative perceptions about Korean birth culture. One individual

was an only child and two were raised with one or more biological siblings. Two expressed a

sense of wanting to distance themselves from Korean culture at some time in their lives, and one

voiced that they continued to maintain this view. Two of the participants stressed that they were

raised in towns that had openly biased views against minority groups. All three expressed some

degree of emotional distance about their relationship with their parents.

Nancy grew up in a Midwestern state where a large number of Korean adoptees have

been sent from the beginning of the Korean adoption practice. She expressed that she had gone

through phases of wanting to know more about Korean birth culture. Not wanting to be seen as a

Korean was evidenced in her statement:

And I was kind of a difficult kid . . . during my teenage years. I really didn't want to have

anything to do with any of the others [Korean adoptees] because I think at that point it

reminded me of myself, which I didn't like. I guess I didn't want to acknowledge that

part. I pretty much spent all of my middle school years being suicidal. Like I said, I was

kind of a weird kid and I think the kids knew that, so they would always tell me, "oh, I

should just go kill myself . . . we'd all be happier if you weren't around . . . I bet your

parents wish that they could return you . . . how much did you cost?"

She also brought up instances of being made fun of for her physical appearance. Nancy did not recall receiving adult or peer support when these incidents occurred. Rather, she was blamed for the other students' behavior. Often times she was told that she was the problem.

Another participant, Frank, stated somewhat negative feelings toward his birth culture:

Not too far from sort of a disinterest . . . I sort of characterize it is that this culture that produced the conditions under which I was abandoned and as a result, I have a mild resentment for it. I don't feel any attachment to the birth culture mainly due to the fact that I don't have a lot of direct personal experience with it growing up or anything else and the mild resentment. That culture has led to the circumstances under which I was abandoned; so ambivalent to slightly negative.

Caren had very little encouragement to explore her birth culture. Her negative perceptions were identified in her statement:

I had mostly ignorance, fear, and shame as related to my birth culture growing up. Acknowledging, that I was from Korea meant that I was not like everyone else in my family, in school, or in the town. Having any curiosity about Korea was difficult. I'm not sure if it was discouraged because of my own uncomfortableness about being different; sort of sticking out or if I was picking up vibes from my parents that it was just a taboo topic. I sensed that it made them uncomfortable . . . or if they thought it was best to bring me up in this sort of loving generous color-blind way.

Adoptive Family Attachment

All 14 participants expressed attachment to their adoptive families. However, the strength of their attachment varied among the individual stories. All individuals conveyed, that as young children, they grew up in loving families where they were cared for and they felt accepted. Being a Korean adoptee was an aspect of being unique, and each individual stated that knowing they

were adopted had been a part of their earliest memories. Only two individuals mentioned faith being part of their adoption narrative. Subthemes of this category were a strong attachment to their adoptive family, disconnection within adoptive family, fear of abandonment, and expectations for higher education.

Strong Attachment to Adoptive Family

Eight of the participants expressed a strong attachment to their adoptive families. Two participants, Molly and Maria, both conveyed that their strong positive perception of adoption was reinforced by parents. Both had strong adoptive family attachments and a positive perception of birth culture and birth parents. Molly conveyed her strong attachment to her adoptive family:

> I always knew that I was adopted from Korea and guess having two White parents, they couldn't ever really try to hide it from me. They always talked to me about the fact that I was adopted and where I was from. My Dad bought a Korean cookbook and then he would take my brother and I down to the Korean market and he would try to make things for us. We're a super close family . . . the way they raised us; the way they always showed their love for us. I've always been so thankful that I have the family that I have and was given the opportunity. My parents worked really hard to send me to a private school from preschool through high school.

Maria was raised in a family with two younger adoptee siblings and three older biological siblings. She expressed her positive outlook toward adoption because her adoptive family was "full of love and warmness." She also talked about her relationship with her siblings:

> My relationships with my younger siblings, the two that are adopted, I think that those are significantly stronger than with our three older biological siblings and I think there are a lot of variables . . . There's a close bond with them. I'm deeply attached to them.

Sometimes it's hard to talk about the wanting to meet the birth family and everything

cause I don't want to hurt my Mom's feelings or Dad's. As I got older I think I'm very

proud to be adopted. I love my family a lot, but I also have a part of my heart for Korea

and for my birth family.

Both Molly and Maria spoke of how their parents told them that they were meant to be a

family. Molly recounted that her mother said, "God chose them to be our parents and us to be

their children for a reason." This statement was similar to Maria's, who attributed her positive

adoption experience and family closeness to her mother:

I think I contribute a lot to my mom. I mean, she always told me I was adopted, but she

always told me it was God that brought me to her. I think growing up with her is what

made us so close and made that positive experience. Because I think I heard that almost

daily . . . how it was God that brought us together. You know, and even though she didn't

carry me for nine months, she waited for me.

These were the only two individuals that mentioned a direct faith component to their

adoption experience. Although some of the other adoptees mentioned being raised in homes

where religion was observed, these two participants specifically talked about how their parent(s)

made verbal connections between God and their adoption.

Disconnection Within Adoptive Family

Although all of the participants expressed attachments to their adoptive families, 12 of

the 14 noted the presence of some type of disconnection to varying degrees. Miles was adopted

by older parents and raised as an only child. He noted that attachment was a struggle:

Adopted people have their own culture with all the perils that we faced and troubles

we've had to overcome. I definitely feel I struggle with attachment issues because of the

adoption process. I was always very nervous about loss whether it be my parents dying or my house burning down. I've always been very cognizant of that and I think that's influenced my behavior . . . We had a good relationship, but perhaps not as deep as it could be if I would have been more focused on living in the present than what might happen in the future. I am the son, the only child.

Five participants talked specifically about their relationships with their mothers. Lehn was a participant who was adopted into a family with a Korean-adopted brother and a biological sister. She said that her mom called her a "Daddy's girl," and she didn't know if she truly agreed with that statement. She admitted that her relationship was easier with her father than with her mother. Jinna recalled that she had "taken everything out on my mom," but they have since developed a closer relationship, and she said, "My mom really has been the biggest strength." Millie said that she was not "super close" to her mother, but they did have a "loving relationship." Another participant Tina also stated that she had a definite feeling of kindness and softness toward her father, but that her relationship with her mother was a bit distant.

Nancy was adopted by a family with one older biological daughter. She described her attachment to adoptive culture as complicated:

My parents were loving. As a little little kid, little little kid, I have nothing bad to say. Like they were very kind and affectionate and sweet . . . but then once you kind of move past the age of 6, 5, 6, 7, not a whole lot of good to say. I don't know. I had a challenging relationship with them. I think that they didn't really understand me. And I think that they did the best that they could, but it was really centered around the victim blaming perspective. I feel like my relationship with my Mom was really not good.

Frank was raised as an only child and expressed disconnection to his parents:

I've found that as an adult it has been very difficult to connect with them and to talk with

them about anything remotely emotional. I kind of actively avoid them. Within my

family, I'm their son. I don't have a whole lot of over-insecurities about my position in

my family. I don't doubt that my parents love me. I do not doubt that they consider me

their son.

Suzzette shared her perception of her relationship within her adoptive family:

I would say that we are connected, but distant, I guess. I feel like there isn't a lot of depth

to our relationship. I don't believe they really truly know who I am and how I feel about

things. And, I think it's frightening for my parents to have vulnerable conversations with

me about where I am in life and what I feel. But, I think it's okay. I had this realization

that although I'm their child, my parents' child; I don't necessarily feel or identify or, I

guess I don't necessarily feel that I'm 100% one of their children. There are things that I

do that don't necessarily feel natural . . . that they're not being perceived in the same way

that if it was coming from one of their biological children. I don't necessarily feel that

I'm 100% wholeheartedly accepted as their child.

Fear of Abandonment

One participant, Caren, shared her insecurity of possibly being abandoned by her

adoptive family. She taught herself to read at the age of four and also displayed musical

giftedness. Caren was enrolled in private piano lessons at four years of age and she quickly

excelled as a piano student. During the interview, she described her fear of being abandoned by

her adoptive family. One way that she could keep her place in the family was to use her musical

and academic talents. Her statement regarding this fear was evidenced in the following quote:

The only way I can describe my childhood to myself, that I was trying very hard not to be

gotten rid of . . . try to earn my place in the family, but the ways that I excelled as a kid

were not normal. And it's hard to parse out because, at the same time, I was gifted in

ways that I couldn't have asked for . . . but I think how some of that applied itself through

the years is quite excessive.

Participant, Frank, shared about fear of abandonment an attachment to his adopted

culture:

I think I would characterize it is blind loyalty and I say blind. I'm conscious of how

absolute it is. How sort of 100% I identify with my adopted culture and 0% I identify

with my birth culture. I think some flavor of desire to please or desire to avoid offending

my adoptive parents, so that I'm not abandoned by them. I think it might be something

like that, but I call it blind really because I can't see it.

Expectations for Higher Education

All 14 participants stated that, to some degree, family expectations influenced their

academic achievements. Furthermore, all 14 individuals said their core family affected their

decisions to pursue higher education. Three participants stated they did not feel pressure from

their parents to go to college. All individuals identified self-expectations as motivation to go on

to college or university. They considered going to college as a natural next step after high school

graduation. Some participants said that being a Korean adoptee did not affect their academic

decisions. However, when they reflected on past experiences, they reconsidered the possible

influences of being an adoptee. Other participants did not feel that being a Korean adoptee had

any influence on their decision to go to college.

Lehn was one of the participants who did not think being Korean influenced her decision

to pursue higher education:

I think about how my birth culture relates to my schooling in general, I think maybe it

made me want to try harder in school. Not necessarily to go to college, but because I feel

like there were always the stereotypes about Asian culture, and being really intelligent,

and I think I really felt like I needed to fit that, but I tried (laughs) . . . I never really felt

that being Korean impacted my life, but I feel that as time went on and I can look back

and reflect, I feel like it kind of did. I feel like my parents always encouraged us to pursue

higher education.

Maria was a participant who did not believe that being Korean influenced her

decision to go to college, but she did express that knowledge of Korean education might have

changed those beliefs:

I think I might have had perceptions especially knowing what the education system was

like in Korea. I might have pushed myself harder to do a little bit better with the grades. I

meant they were always good, but they could have been better. And I think it would have

given me another benchmark to meet instead of just, hey I'm gonna follow my siblings'

footsteps and because it's what my parents want.

During the follow-up conversation, Frank expressed his reflective thoughts on his higher

education journey. The initial interview had prompted him to think about adoption and its effects

on motivation to higher education:

I was thinking about how my adoption-related motivation on studying affected the

decision I have done post-graduation, maybe in the sense that there's a part of me that

recognized the perverse motivations or sort of the adoption-related influences on studying

and used it as a confounding variable in terms of whether I really wanted to do any of

this.

Millie stated that she had seen education as a way to get out of her small town and have

more opportunities. She said that her parents had made "college like a normal next step. I don't

feel like they were pushy about it because I was so motivated." She also stated that

I think I did what I did because of the environment and community I grew up in . . . and I do think, growing up as a person of color in small-town White America made me want to go and explore the world more. And whether or not that's related to adoption that's kinda hard for me to decipher. When people ask me why I got my masters, it's kind of like I just wanted to.

Participant Alyssa stated that going to college was something that she had always wanted to do and further her education: "To leave the house, be on my own, be an adult. Just experience all those things. I think it's really important for people to get away because I think it helps them grow up."

Participant Colleen stated that her parents never put pressure on her to go to college. Her parents and family members were very supportive of her decision to pursue a higher degree. She also felt that being Korean had some influence over her motivation to do well in school. She said, "People like that [Korean] did well in school . . . and so I just always knew that like school was something I was gonna do well in."

Because Molly knew her career path from a very young age, she stated that college was not an option. She said of her career: "That was always just something that I wanted to grow up to be and my parents never pushed me in that direction." She further credited her high school guidance counselor as being an important helper in her planning for college.

Miles stated that it was always assumed that he would go to college:

It was always evident that I had the academic chops to do that and that my parents had the resources to do it. Like I said, my Mom graduated college and worked in education, so my parents obviously valued that.

In regards to higher education, Caren stated that very few of her adoptive family

members had pursued advanced degrees. She said that "it wasn't assumed you would go to college. I think in general, but it was assumed for me that I would [go]." Keeley shared, "My parents were always very supportive of us, of my brother and I going to college. We grew up in an environment where we didn't think there was any other way." Nancy and Suzzette stated that parents in their communities expected their children to grow up and go to college. Nancy said that "it was just assumed that I would go to school [college]. I did what I did because of the environment and community I grew up in."

Suzzette was expected to go to college and described it as a "non-negotiable." Also, she said that she was pushed to succeed throughout her schooling. Her perceptions of her parents' support are identified in her statement:

My parents were definitely proponents of higher education for me going to college was basically a non-negotiable. It was you're gonna go to college no matter what. So, they were always in support of education and really pushed me to succeed. So, I think that definitely was a factor in me completing a college degree.

Jinna said that her parents expected her to work hard and do her best. In regards to earning a higher degree, she stated the following:

Being Korean hasn't really added to my wanting to do higher education. It's just . . . I honestly think it was more my adoptive parents because they were teachers. For me, I'm always trying to prove myself and not necessarily to anybody else; sometimes I am, but more to me. Like there are too many people that believe because you're Asian, whether female or male, that you are so much smarter. You're supposed to be there or maybe you got in because of your race. So, for me, I feel that I'm constantly trying to prove that I'm actually supposed to be there and it's not necessarily a fluke or I played a card or whatever. The first weekend I was there [college], some girl walked up and you know the

slow-talking yelling at "do you speak English" kind of conversation and she's asking if I'm lost and I'm like, oh girl you need to get away from me. At the time, there was a large group of Asians on campus and there wasn't a group . . . we found out that we could start our own group.

Jinna's statements regarding her university experience intersected with stereotypes and the model minority myth. Additionally, all participants voiced being stereotyped at some point in time during their school years and also in college or university experiences. During the interviews, participants raised the topic of stereotype before I asked questions about the model minority myth.

Stereotypes and the Model Minority Myth

All 14 participants in this study expressed frustration over being stereotyped and labeled with the model minority myth. Four individuals were not familiar with the term *model minority myth* but had experienced the attitudes and perceptions related to it. Additionally, all participants stated that to some degree, being Korean was a factor in achieving academically. Similar accounts were shared between individuals' recollections of being expected to be good at math and science or expected to be an overall excellent student. Two participants mentioned being approached by veterans who had served in the Korean War and were told how Korean people were hard-working and good people. Both conveyed a level of discomfort with these encounters. Two individuals were music education majors who experienced stereotyping concerning which music area they were expected to major. Additionally, three participants expressed concern over racism and how the model minority myth sets Asians against one another.

Good at Math, Science, or Excellent Student

All 14 participants stated that they had been expected to be good at math and science. Five individuals said that they were not good at math. Molly said that she had been told, "oh, you must be really good at math." She went on to say, that in retrospect, she truly felt those types of comments were not made with "malicious intent" and that they were said in a joking manner.

Colleen told of her experiences in school where others expected her to be a good student in math or science due to her Korean heritage:

> I repeatedly heard this should be easy for you. Your people are really good at this subject, math or science. They just kind of had that expectation placed on me, and I would always have to tell them, "I'm really not that good at science." One time in college, this person, he got stuck in a group with me and two other people. And I think he just assumed that I was one of those 'I had to get A's, my parents expect this of me' and he was like, basically thought I was gonna do all of this stuff and I was like, no dude. I don't think you get it. I'm self-motivated and my parents do not put pressure on me to get A's all the time. Don't try and pin all of this work on me!

> Frank was also a high achieving student. He said that

> throughout elementary, middle, and high school and even into college and beyond, when peers would comment on my good grades or my test scores or my . . . whatever I was doing. Whatever I was achieving to a high level and doing, saying some equivalent to oh, it must be because he's Asian. Asians are good at math. Asians are good at school. Asians are good test takers. That's sort of [what] I got from my peers always or like, if you want to do good on this assignment get in Frank's group cause he's Asian.

Interactions with Korean War Veterans

Frank said that he hated the model minority stereotype and recalled that from elementary through college to the present that people would comment on his good grades and attribute it to his Asian heritage. As a youngster, while he was mowing the lawn, a neighbor stopped him and started a conversation saying, "When I was in the War in Korea, I met a lot of Koreans and they were the most hard-working honest people. I'm sure your parents must be so proud of you." The participant acknowledged that the neighbor was giving profuse praise, but that

> [it felt] alienating for me because they were attributing to something that didn't in my
>
> mind at the very least have anything to do with my educational attainment. Whenever it
>
> happened it always made me a little angry for the sake of my parents, my adoptive
>
> parents. I wanted to say "no, it's not because I'm an Asian immigrant. It's because of [my
>
> parents] and my work ethic is their work ethic."

Millie shared her experiences regarding uncomfortable feelings about being approached by Korean War veterans. Through a member checking follow-up email, she wrote the following:

> I forgot to mention that there was a VA hospital in (City) where I grew up. This is
>
> important because the way I was treated by veterans still happens today. It makes me just
>
> as uncomfortable today as it did when I was younger. It's everything from the looks, to
>
> speaking to me in Korean, and sometimes other Asian languages, to asking me to smile
>
> for them. Even sometimes it's them wanting to recount their heroism in my country and
>
> how I should be thankful for them saving my country. It happened at least once a week
>
> when I worked at (store) as a teen and nearly weekly when I worked at a family-run diner
>
> in Spokane, Washington. It also happens in random places, like airports and running
>
> basic errands. I don't want to stereotype veterans, but this has occurred so many times.

Danger of Model Minority Myth

Participants voiced their dislike of being stereotyped be the model minority myth. While some individuals did not like the stereotype, they accepted they could not change other people's views. However, some participants maintained their belief that the model minority myth was dangerous and unfair to Koreans and Asians. Nancy was one such participant. When asked about the model minority myth, she said that

It's very dangerous. In my work… [agency] serves low-income Korean Americans. I think there needs to be a lot of education around that because it is the assumption that yes…when you look at the numbers, I would say Northeast Asians are more educated; are in the professional workforce in higher number proportion-wise. But, they're also more likely to live in poverty. They [Asian Americans] are the fastest-growing immigrant population in the United States and they have the highest poverty rates, which a lot of people don't know. I think it's because I think White people want to pit minority groups against each other . . . I think communities of color need to collaborate more and there's a lot of challenges around that.

Another participant, Tina, stated the following:

Asians sort of blend in, but don't make too much noise, not too squeaky, but support really well and do a lot and get things achieved and done, and just are great at academics, especially. What are my thoughts on it? I would say it's a double-edged sword, I think. In one way it gets your foot in the door as far as folks to have . . . generally there'll be an opening to somebody in a model minority group. However, then it does present a gap cause you are again, a minority or outside a group, you're gonna get capped at some point because you're not supposed to go beyond the basic level of achievement, or you're not supposed to want to like higher positions.

Stereotyping was experienced by Caren and Jinna in their university programs of study. Both of these participants had majored in music education at Midwestern universities. Both of them stated that professors and other music students tried to place them in different majors. As a career, Caren chose musical performance as an accompanist and professor. She talked about how stereotyping had been evident in her life experiences:

I think it was very much a part of my growing up. I think I still deal with it today

I think that it's hard for me to parse out how much the perception of me and how much

was just actually true regardless of what others were expecting and because I was so good

in school. I was very quiet there. I think I've lived my entire life with an expectation of

"of course you're that way," and I think it has a lot to do with being Asian or looking

Korean. I think that as an adult, and as someone who has been in academia, and to take

on some more non-traditional kinds of work, because I think the expectation is that "I'm

not someone who'll lead and be in charge or tell others what to do. I'm someone who will

fall in line and someone who will go along with status quo." Or just be sort of invisible

and in the wings, but working very hard.

Caren's statement indicated her experiences of being marginalized. Her feelings had been dismissed by other people who were dismissive of her feelings because they viewed her as Asian.

Jinna studied vocal music education at a Midwestern university. She shared how others believed her to be in the wrong major:

As a music major and the only vocal music major in the entire music department at

[university], it was kind of an interesting thing. It was teachers and students that always

thought I was playing piano or violin or something like that and when they found out I

was a vocal major they were like, "What?" So, education-wise, I didn't have to butt up

against anyone in my education degree. It was more in the music building because they

thought I was in the wrong spot.

Jinna's experience described the stereotype of Asians being pianists or violinist. As she stated, this belief was held among the music staff and students.

Maria stated that "this might sound kind of silly, but I think sometimes that the stereotypes that arise about Asians, I think sometimes, subconsciously I didn't want to succeed as well because of those stereotypes. I don't know if that makes sense." Miles also stated that he believed the model minority myth to be a harmful stereotype:

It certainly doesn't apply across the board, but is based on mostly the dominant culture's perspective of Asians and how they've performed in America. It can certainly be used to, not demonize, but explain, or try to put the lack of success for other groups or themselves rather than on the systemic issues that caused them. Yes, I think it's a harmful myth that persists in our culture. And also some Asians themselves you know are not aware of the harmful effects of it.

Complexity of Identity

This category of complexity of identity included themes of assimilation, confusion, and reclaiming Korean identity. Description of identity in general was a complex topic of discussion for most of the participants. All 14 participants expressed feelings of confusion or questioning how they identified themselves. Also, all participants acknowledged that they have been assimilated into the majority White population. The words these adoptees used to describe themselves were *Korean adoptee*, *transracial adoptee*, *White in an Asian body*, *Korean American*, *complicated*, *complex*, and *confusing*. Some participants said that they felt the need to explain themselves to others.

Assimilation

All of the participants indicated their assimilation to what they considered White culture. They recognized that their physical appearance identified them as Asian to people who did not know them. Also, being in certain groups affected how they saw themselves. This resulted in assimilating within groups of friends or colleagues. Frank's statement about identity indicated his confusion:

> [Identity] in a word: confused. I think transracial gets at the broad strokes, gets at how I feel about my ethnic identity or my ethnic cultural identity. I sort of feel like a White person trapped in an Asian body and so I can relate strongly to both aspects of it. I can relate strongly to being a minority in mainstream United States culture and also I know what it's like to grow up in an environment that's predominantly White. For me, it's just how it is.

Lehn said that she felt like a "White woman trapped in an Asian woman's body." This view was also shared by Keeley who said that she had identified as a White person rather than an Asian American while she was earning her undergraduate degree. She had felt the need to assimilate, fit in, and prove herself. Alyssa stated that she identified more with being White because her parents were White. She also said that people had told her that she spoke "White" and she said, "I feel like I speak like I'm educated. I would probably connect more with a Caucasian [because of my background]."

Regarding identity, Suzzette said that she did not identify as being Korean because of her environment:

> I forget myself that I'm even Asian! (laughter). I don't know if that sounds crazy, but I really don't feel like I have any identity within my Korean culture. You know everything,

the person that I married, the people that are my friends, my colleagues at work, extended

family, they're all White. They're all very American.

Nancy shared her thoughts about identity:

I think actually living here in [city] helped a lot because I'm told so many times, "oh,

you're so White," and that's so insulting. But then at the same time, I'm like, is it really

insulting? I'm like, I don't know, is there something wrong with being White? I'm sure

we've all heard certain iterations of those types of statements in our lives. And I feel

really strongly to me Korean American now. And I think my initial challenges, not that

they weren't real, but I just needed to find the right people.

Confusion

Participants described identity as being complex and confusing for some participants.

They talked about how their visual appearance differentiated them from others in their

communities. One participant wanted to be known as a Korean woman rather than as an adoptee.

Regarding identity, Millie said the following:

I feel like I change with my mood (laughter). I feel that being adopted is a big part of my

identity and I've been trying to dig into my Korean identity more and growing up in the

States that's also part of my identity. I definitely think my identity is evolving, especially

within adopted culture. I remember someone talking about how transracial adoptees hold

parts of so many social identities, like immigrant, refugee, citizen, adoptee, and more.

The more I learn about the experiences of other members of the API (Asian Pacific

Islander) community and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) communities in

general, the more I understand the similarities in our stories yet uniqueness, and

sometimes loneliness, of being a transracial and transnational adoptee.

Nancy said that she thought of her identity as a Korean woman:

I think a lot of people feel comfortable saying I'm an adoptee. I am, but I don't want that

experience to define me. I feel like my experience being an Asian American woman

defines me more than the fact that I was adopted.

Reclaiming Korean Identity

All 14 participants recognized that they were Korean by birth and that their visual

appearance set them apart as Korean or Asian. Furthermore, 13 of the 14 participants stated that

they had a further interest in identifying themselves as a Korean adoptee, Korean, or Korean

American.

Two participants have met at least one birth parent. Since meeting their biological family

member(s) and returning to visit Korea, one participant expressed wanting to identify more with

her Korean heritage and felt a sense of loss and a barrier to reclaiming their heritage.

Keeley talked about her identity as complex:

In the last couple of years being really called and compelled to create those connections

and that sense of attachment to my heritage, I really want to feel attached to it, but there

is and definitely was a very distinct separation between myself and my heritage. Again, I

would not have described myself as Korean other than my outward appearance. There

was not attachment to Korean culture, in any meaningful way for me . . . until very

recently I felt so over whelmed at my inability to connect with it. The sense of loss and

mourning over something that can never really be mine you know? There's such a

missing 20 something years of it. How am I supposed to reclaim an entire culture?

Summary

In this chapter, I presented four major findings and twelve subsequent findings. I

organized the chapter by the categories that emerged from the interviews and the themes that

evolved as the participants shared their life experiences. Data from interviews, journals, follow-

up interviews, and member checking helped to uncover the research participants' perceptions and attachments connected to birth culture, adopted culture, and adopted family in relation to their pursuit of higher education. I included extensive quotes from the participants, thereby reinforcing data confidence through the display of the actual lived experiences.

The first finding of perceptions and feelings of attachment to birth culture included subcomponents of limited perception, positive perception and feelings of attachment to birth culture, and negative perception with no attachment to birth culture. This finding addressed my first research question: What are the perceptions of Korean adoptees regarding connection to birth culture in their pursuit of higher education? All participants acknowledge being a Korean adoptee and their birth country was Korea. They also attributed that their depth of knowledge about Korea and Korean culture had been influenced by their parents. Responses to the interview questions were interwoven throughout the interview, demonstrating the complexity of the research problem.

The second finding of adoptive family attachment enveloped subcomponents of strong attachment to adoptive family, disconnection within adoptive family, fear of abandonment, and expectations for higher education. Although it was noted that eight participants stated feelings of strong attachment to their birth families, there were 12 that also stated feelings of disconnection, which indicated a mixture of feelings. Two participants expressed close relationship and attachment to their adopted families with faith being an important aspect of their narrative. Two participants expressed fear of being abandoned by their adoptive family. All 14 participants stated that their adoptive families influenced their pursuit of higher education. This finding addressed the second research question: What are the perceptions and lived experiences of Korean adoptees regarding connection to adopted culture in their pursuit of a degree in higher education?

The third finding of stereotypes and the model minority myth included subthemes of being good at math, science, or an excellent student, interactions with Korean War veterans, and the dangers of the model minority myth. Although four participants were not familiar with the term *model minority myth*, all of the participants shared their dislike of Asian stereotypes. This finding addressed the third research question: What are the perceptions and lived experiences of Korean adoptees regarding connection to their adopted families in their pursuit of a degree in higher education?

The fourth finding was the complexity of identity accompanied by themes of assimilation, confusion, and reclaiming Korean identity. Individuals commentated that they had been raised in mainly White or Caucasian homes and towns. This presented confusion for some because their visual appearance did not match those around them. Some wanted to learn more about their birth culture so they could feel more connected to Korea. This finding was connected to all three of the research questions.

In Chapter 5, I include a full discussion of the findings, recommendations for practitioners in higher education, and concluding remarks.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter I recapitulate the problem statement and purpose of the study. I also include the discussion of the findings, limitations, implications, and recommendations for practitioners in higher education, and recommendations for future study. I end the chapter with concluding remarks.

The problem statement of this qualitative case study was that there have been many children adopted from South Korea since the time of the Korean War. This unique population has been identified as transracial adoptees. Most recently, within their community, they have termed themselves as KADs, meaning Korean adoptees. Although existing literature has provided information on KAD identity formation and their discovery of Korean ethnic heritage and culture, there remains questions surrounding how these life events intertwined with familial attachments and ultimately influenced their pursuits of higher education. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine how South Korean adoptees' perceptions of lived experience regarding connection to birth culture, adopted culture, and attachment to adopted families influenced their pursuit of degree attainment in higher education.

The original research questions for this study were:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of Korean adoptees regarding connection to birth culture in their pursuit of higher education?

RQ2: What are the perceptions and lived experiences of Korean adoptees regarding connection to adopted culture in their pursuit of a degree in higher education?

RQ3: What are the perceptions and lived experiences of Korean adoptees regarding connection to their adopted families in their pursuit of a degree in higher education?

Discussion of the Findings

In this study, four major categories were revealed from my analysis of the data. The first major category was perceptions and feelings of attachment to birth culture. The category themes were limited perception, positive perception, and negative perception. The second major category was adoptive family attachment with four themes. Themes were strong attachment to adoptive family, disconnection within the adoptive family, fear of abandonment by the adoptive family, and family expectations for higher education. The third major category was stereotypes and the model minority myth (Wing, 2007). Themes in this category included being good at math, science, or an excellent student, interactions with Korean War veterans, and the dangers of the model minority myth. The fourth major category was the complexity of identity (Witenstein & Saito, 2015). Three themes in this category were assimilation (Hoffman & Peña, 2013), confusion (Hoffman & Peña, 2013; Palmer, 2011), and reclaiming Korean identity (Beaupre et al., 2015; Shiao and Tuan, 2008).

Perceptions and Feelings of Attachment to Birth Culture

Previous studies involving Korean adoptees predominantly focused on ethnic identity, ethnic identity formation, and ethnic socialization. These terms were found in the majority of the reviewed literature (Hoffman & Peña, 2013; Hu et al., 2017; Song & Lee, 2009; Shiao & Tuan, 2008; Witenstein & Saito, 2015). In this study, the terms *perception of birth culture* or *attachment to birth culture* were not found in the literature. Consequently, questions remained about how Korean adoptees perceived their birth culture, if they felt attached to birth culture, and how these ideas affected the individual's pursuit of higher education.

In this present study, three major themes emerged from these participating Korean adoptees' perceptions about their Korean birth culture. The Korean adoptee responses to the questions about birth culture attachment and perceptions were categorized into one of three

groups: limited knowledge of birth culture, positive perceptions and attachment to birth culture, or negative perceptions and no attachment to birth culture.

Limited Knowledge

Those with limited knowledge expressed a growing interest to learn more about the Korean birth culture. All of the participants in this category stated that they developed interest in learning about Korean culture. Some of the participants in this group were introduced to aspects of birth culture by attending culture camps. Baden (2015) found that culture camp experience for Korean adoptees may alleviate depression and anxiety. Baden (2015) further suggested that culture camp could influence ethnic identity. Although some of the participants in this study participated in a culture awareness camp, their responses did not indicate that the culture camp experience greatly strengthened their perception of birth culture. As one participant remembered, they had little interest in attending culture camp, but it provided some exposure to cultural elements. Individual accounts of their experiences suggested that they acquired knowledge about the Korean language, food, and some of the Korean culture. Additionally, these participants identified themselves as Korean and as adoptees. This finding was consistent with Yoon (2001), who suggested that parental support of ethnic socialization was associated with positive feelings of ethnic identity.

Participants stated that connections with other Asian students or individuals during different phases of life also helped them develop an interest in learning about their birth culture. Further, the most salient time of birth culture interest took place during their teen years or when they went to college. This finding was also consistent with the findings of Shiao and Tuan (2008) who posited that during early adulthood, social context influenced Korean adoptees to explore ethnic identity.

Positive Perceptions

Participants who expressed positive perceptions and attachments to Korean birth culture also had parental encouragement to learn about Korea. Compared with other participants in the study who claimed to have limited knowledge, these participants voiced that their parents spoke respectfully about Korea and birth families. Also, these families had more than one Asian adoptee in the home. One of these individuals was raised by a Korean-born mother, whose influence contributed to a positive perception about the birth country.

These findings are supported by the work of Hu et al. (2017), who suggested that parental ethnic socialization efforts during childhood influenced comfortability with ethnic identity. Furthermore, Song and Lee (2009) claimed that there was a significant relationship between identity and experienced cultural activities in adulthood. The participants in this positive perception category theme stated that their parents also recognized their status of being adopted and their Korean ethnicity. Further, these findings supported of Pinderhughes et al.'s conclusion that parents of transracial adoptees were important influencers for the cultural socialization of their children (2015).

Negative Perceptions

There were only three individuals that expressed negative perceptions about their birth culture. One individual had negative perceptions as a child but had since developed positive perceptions and also an attachment to Korean culture. Another participant with a negative perception expressed their desire to "distance myself from my birth culture. I don't feel any attachment to the birth culture mainly due to the fact that I don't have a lot of direct personal experiences with it growing up or anything else." This participant's statement was substantiated by Beaupre et al. (2015), who found that less ethnic socialization was related to less ethnic identity commitment.

Adoptive Family Attachment

This second major category included four themes: strong attachment, disconnection, fear of abandonment, and expectations. Four participants in the present study expressed closeness to their mothers. It was found by Swartz et al. (2012) that maternal bonding between mothers and their internationally adopted children was made possible by continuous, concentrated efforts. These researchers found that the mothers were diligent in their work to integrate the new child into the biological family. In their study, Swartz et al. (2012) found that mothers also helped their children learn about their adoption, birth country, and these families outwardly celebrated the adoption day (Swartz et al., 2012). Additionally, researchers have discovered that intercountry adoptive parents often work toward developing a secure attachment with their adoptee (Pryor & Pettinelli, 2011). Therefore, the efforts of the adoptive parents were key factors to cultivate attachments between themselves and their adopted child. Moreover, Langreher et al. (2017) found that open communication about adoption helped in the building of family bonds. In the present study, the research supported the findings of positive family attachments and open communication about adoption. The term *real parents* was observed by Darnell et al. (2017) in their study of adult Korean adoptees pertaining to ethnic identity. They found that the individuals' attachment to their adoptive parent coincided with their use of the terms *mom* and *dad*. In the present study, all of the participants referred to their adoptive parents as their parents and used these same terms.

In the present study, one participant stated that her parents integrated the three aspects reported by Swartz et al. (2010)—they helped the adoptee learn about their adoption, their birth country, and the family celebrated adoption day. This individual stated that her father celebrated her adoption day like a birthday with candy, a special card, and a present. It was also the father who bought a Korean cookbook and took her and her adopted brother to the Asian market to find

the ingredients for special recipes. Both of her parents sent her to a day camp to learn about Korean culture. This was the only participant who specifically talked about having a close relationship with both of her parents and interacted with them daily. Her close familial attachment appeared to be connected to the experiences celebrating her adoption. Beaupre et al. (2015) suggested that the involvement of the mother was the main influence in ethnic identity commitment and the father's involvement made no difference. However, the involvement of this participant's father in her adoption story appeared to have influenced her attachment to her adoptive family. Furthermore, the father's actions, such as shopping at the Asian market, cooking Korean food, and celebrating her adoption day, appeared to have impacted the participant's positive perception of birth culture. Additionally, Yoon (2001) concluded that positive parent-child relationships were causal in the development of collective self-esteem.

A subtheme of faith was found in this theme of family attachment. Two participants mentioned that they were told by their parents that God had chosen them for each other. Both of these individuals described their homes as being full of love. They also expressed having felt closeness and love for their family members. Although this finding is not supported in the literature, it could be suggested that faith and the belief in "being meant for one another" could influence an adoptees' attachment to their adopted family. This finding could be controversial because some adoptees believe it is a false narrative. Such beliefs can be found among Korean adoptees on social media. They state that they are against international adoption and believe that such religious beliefs have been promoted as excuses for organizational and governmental financial profit. Also, some expressed concerns that being told, "they were meant to be together" is a way to soothe hurt and explain away questions that arise from being severed from their birth country. Such words do not provide answers, nor do they serve as a solution to end the suffering or trauma that the adoptee may experience. It could be argued that such an approach encourages

an emotional environment in which the adoptee can thrive during their primary phases of development. The two participants in this present study presented themselves as healthy functioning adults with strong familial attachments to their adoptive families. Furthermore, both participants verbally expressed love and gratitude for being adopted and for being adopted into their families. Therefore, from this finding, I suggest that adoptees can experience a strengthened positive development of identity. I also suggest that Korean adoptees can internalize their value when they hear "that they were meant to be together" from their adoptive parents. However, religious beliefs alone are probably not sufficient but should be supported with a positive representation of adoption, birth culture, and a celebration of the adoption day.

Disconnection

Adoptees who were detached from their adoptive families had trouble with feelings of closeness (Langrehr et al., 2015). Some KADs had difficulty with familial closeness because they chose to search for their birth families. In the present study, 12 of the 14 participants voiced that even though they loved their families, there were still feelings of disconnection or the absence of emotional closeness. One of the participants stated that they did not feel 100% a part of their adopted family. This participant believed that she was not received the same way as the other biological children. This situation was consistent with the findings of Fensbo (2001), who argued that adoptive families did not function as well as biological families. The participant in the present study believed that her actions were not received the same as the biological siblings. A tone of sadness was noted as the participant related this information.

Another individual stated that adoption was the reason he struggled with feelings of attachment. Also, he admitted to being preoccupied with the possibility of tragic loss while he was growing up. This could be intertwined with the theme of fear of abandonment by the adoptive family.

Fear of Abandonment by the Adoptive Family

Two participants shared their fear of being abandoned by their adoptive families. Both of these individuals were high academic achievers from the beginning of their formal education. Also, they were early readers and they both earned doctoral degrees. One participant stated that "[she] was trying very hard not to be gotten rid of." The other participant did not want to offend his adoptive parents by any type of behavior that could have been interpreted as such.

Expectations for Higher Education

All 14 participants stated that they had been influenced by their families to pursue higher education. The majority of them had felt that going on to college or university was a natural next step. One participant stated that it was easy for her to attend the university because her father was a professor at her institution and tuition was not a concern. None of the participants mentioned financial hardship as being an issue.

Most of the participants did not believe that being Korean by birth affected their decisions to attend college. However, some reflected that being Korean had possibly impacted their academic decisions. Many of the participants stated that others see Asians as "so much smarter." Another participant felt that it was necessary to "prove" to others that she was supposed to be in higher education. This statement was interrelated to the themes of stereotypes and the model minority myth (Wing, 2007). Once the individuals in the present study entered the spaces of higher learning, some of them encountered more pronounced experiences regarding stereotypes and the model minority myth.

Previous research has found that students had higher academic achievement in school when they experienced nurturing and positive relational interactions (MacKay et al., 2010). Also, it had been found that children had healthier attachments with teachers and higher academic achievement if positive relationship building occurred in early school settings (Pianta &

Stuhlman, 2004). The findings of the present study are supported by these existing findings as most of the participants expressed positive school experiences and high academic achievement. Only one participant stated a negative school experience because of bullying incidents by other students. Nevertheless, she was a high-achieving student.

An intersecting theme was that individuals who had a positive perception of their Korean birth culture also stated that they had experienced positive situations in school. Furthermore, these participants all conveyed being content with their elementary through high school educational experiences.

As participants went on to study in higher education, most had positive experiences with campus life. Also, they were able to form new friendships and some connected with other Asians. This appears to be in contrast with Suda and Hartlep (2016), who found that transracially adopted Asian college students held self-perceptions of invisibility. This contrast could exist, because although the participants of this study described themselves as Korean adoptees, all had expressed feelings of assimilation into White culture.

One participant helped found an Asian advocacy group on her university campus. Their actions proved to be a needed service to represent all Asian students that felt that they did not have representation. According to Samura (2016), Asians were seen as being overrepresented on college campuses, yet were underserved. Also, it was noted by two participants that other students on the college campus mistakenly identified them as international Asian students. This type of occurrence was also recognized by Yeo et al. (2019), who found that Asian students were grouped as "them" by non-Asian peers. Further, it was noted that distinct physical features visually set Asians apart, therefore creating instances of mistaken identity between groups of Asians.

Stereotypes and the Model Minority Myth

It was recognized by Wing (2007) that Asian students were viewed as being naturally good at math. This view is consistent with the model minority myth, which the participants of this study had experienced. Although, some of the participants were unfamiliar with the term, nevertheless, they were able to talk about being expected to be good at math or science. Some stated that their peers and teachers commented that they should be good at math because they were Asian. Other participants believed this stereotyping was dangerous, and that such perceptions set up barriers among the different groups of Asians.

One participant recounted when a college classmate expected her to do the majority of the work in a group project. She said that the classmate voiced his belief that since she was Asian, her family probably expected her to get all A's. This account was supported by Wing (2007), who found the presence of a false perception that all Asians come from families that have high expectations and values of education.

In the present study, feelings toward expectations of being an Asian or Korean were expressed by all of the participants. One participant had been told, "Of course, you're that way." She believed those expectations were due to looking Korean, and that it was a major part of her growing up. She also stated that she continues to deal with such expectations in certain situations.

Complexity of Identity

Participants acknowledge being Korean but adopted, which was confusing to them because of their physical appearance. Participants in the present study described themselves as "Korean trapped in a White body." This was consistent with the findings of Hoffman and Peña (2013), who discovered that Korean adoptees needed to have connections with others who had similar physical features. All of the participants in the present study grew up in Midwestern

states and assimilated into the regional culture. Although some had been given opportunities to explore their birth culture with the encouragement of their adoptive parents, they have been assimilated into White American culture. This idea was addressed by Palmer (2010), who suggested that Korean adoptees were engaged in a dance of identities due to assimilation.

Exploration of Korean identity was described as being in phases of life by some participants. This space of exploration was supported in the work of Witenstein and Saito (2015), who recognized this as a third space. They described this third space as a space in which Korean adoptees examined their identity from country of birth to the United States.

Two of the participants had met at least one birth parent and had visited Korea. Although one of the individuals met a birth family member on her visit to Korea, she still felt loss over not being able to fully claim her birth culture.

Data Analysis in Relation to the Research Questions

The first research question was the following: What are the perceptions and lived experiences of Korean adoptees regarding connection to birth culture in their pursuit of a degree in higher education? An analysis of the findings suggests that many Korean adoptees have little knowledge of birth culture and enter into phases of wanting to know more about their country of birth. Others have negative perceptions and have either changed their perceptions or have maintained a negative view. Some of the participants of this study were instilled with a positive view, celebrated their Korean birth culture, and continued to hold positive views. It was assumed that birth culture would not influence the pursuit of higher education by Korean adoptees; yet, the findings suggest that for some individuals, it served as a motivator.

The second research question was the following: What are the perceptions and lived experiences of Korean adoptees regarding connection to adopted culture in their pursuit of a degree in higher education? In their narratives, participants identified connections to adopted

culture and their pursuit of higher education. Some individuals stated that they had lived in communities where it was expected that children would go to college. Therefore, they held the belief that college was expected and was a natural next step of education. Because Korean adoptees would be assimilated to their adopted culture, it was assumed that their lived experiences would be connected to their pursuit of a degree in higher education.

The third research question was the following: What are the perceptions and lived experiences of Korean adoptees regarding connection to their adopted families in their pursuit of a degree in higher education? From the interviews, I suggest that the connection between Korean adoptees and their adopted families was the determining factor in their pursuit of a degree in higher education. The Korean adoptees in this study were adopted into middle and upper-middle-class families with financial supports, parents with college degrees, and the expectation that college was the next step after high school. All 14 participants shared they were self-motivated to attend college and earn a degree, and that their parents influenced their decision to pursue higher education.

Limitations

A limitation of this study was the small sample size of only 14 participants. Also, because the study was limited to the Midwest, individual stories may have been influenced by regional culture. For example, most of the participants were raised in smaller communities where there were limited populations of diversity. All of the participants voiced that the major population in their towns were White. Another limitation of the study was the disproportionate ratio of female to male participants. Out of a total of 14 participants, there were 12 female participants and only two male participants.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the data analysis, I can make the following recommendations for practical application and future research. It is important to understand KADs and their lived experiences as they pursue higher education because of their unique circumstances. Although it was revealed in this study that their adoptive family influenced their decision to pursue higher education, KADs encounter academic pressure due to stereotyping and the model minority myth.

Recommendations for Practical Application

This study showed that KADs were mostly influenced by their adoptive parents and adoptive culture in their pursuit of higher education. As this population of students continues to enter college and university campuses, it is important to keep in mind their circumstances concerning Asian identity and pressures caused by stereotyping and the model minority myth (Wing, 2007). Since many higher education institutions already have student support services to help individuals navigate college life, some of the recommendations may already be in place. Nevertheless, this unique community of individuals must find a place of belonging in higher learning institutions. Additionally, value recognition of Korean adoptees in academic spaces could reduce their marginalization and assumptions of the model minority myth.

Recommendations for Higher Learning Administration and Faculty

- Expand available services for students of the Korean adoptee community to include them as active voices in academic classrooms, advisory committees, and other student leadership roles.

- Recognize this community of individuals as being their own unique entity, thereby giving Korean adoptees a space in higher education to explore ethnic identity and connect with other individuals with similar experiences.

- Raise awareness of the professional development and advising or mentoring capabilities of faculty interacting with students from the Korean adoptee community.

- Cultivate cultures of learning in which Korean adoptees can study in spaces of higher education free of the model minority myth.

If the individual gatekeepers of power in higher education in the Midwestern United States and also across the country are serious about embracing diverse populations, they must be willing to include Korean adoptees as active student voices to breakdown the model minority myth and eliminate racism against Asians. Also, within this paradigm shift to include Korean adoptees as advocates on college campuses, there must be the recognition of the policies that have paved their way to this country. Korean adoptees can and must further an understanding of governmental and international relations on college and university campuses that will motivate and lead to action for adoption reform and reevaluation of treatment of family and single mothers across the globe.

As a participant in the Korean adoptee community, I have been made aware of their many views concerning adoption. We have been treated as a disposable group of children that have grown into adulthood and want answers as to why the Korean government and people did not want us. Some of us survived the Korean War and some of us did not. Some of us have been fortunate to find our birth families while others have not been so lucky. Some were adopted into healthy loving families, and some were adopted into abuse and squalor. Some have been raised by wealthy families and others by medium-income families. Some have been banished to their country of birth because naturalization papers were not completed and US citizenship was not granted. Some Korean adoptees passionately claim that we have been sold and bought on an auction block under the pretense of adoption and serve only as a cover for the financial gain of governments. There is nothing that can fill the missing pieces of being separated from birth

mothers and birth culture. However, this is a crucial time in which the practice of adoption can and must be reformed. Therefore, individuals within institutions of higher learning can help Korean adoptees prepare as activists, advocates, politicians, and leaders of change. College- and university-focused student leadership and student development programs for Korean adoptees could have far-reaching effects on adoption reform for all adoptees.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research of Korean adoptees and their experiences in higher education should be conducted to gain a more in-depth understanding of these individuals. The second major finding pertained to adoptive family attachments and how parents made college a natural next step for the participants. However, some participants stated the possibility that being Korean by birth might have influenced the adoptee's educational decisions. Recommendations for future research include:

- Based on the finding that some Korean adoptees are attached to their adoptive culture and pursue higher education due to expectations of their adoptive parents and their surrounding environment, a similar study should be conducted focused on public schools' ability to meet the needs of Korean adoptees and all international adoptees.

- A larger sample size should be interviewed from across the continental United States. This study was limited by a sample size of 14 participants. Also, a balance in participant gender is desired for a future study.

- Based on the subtheme of faith in attachment to the adoptive family, further research should be conducted to find its deeper implications to the Korean adoption experience.

From the findings of this research study, the adoptive family was the most influential factor for Korean adoptees to pursue higher education. Therefore, adoption agencies, workers, and policymakers need to understand the importance of prospective adoptive parents' view of education. If adoptive parents hold the belief that education is valuable, they will most likely encourage their adopted child to attend college or university. In the present study, there were a few participants raised in households in which one parent had not finished college. However, those participants did attend college and earned a degree due to the expectation placed on them by their parents, community, school, or self-motivation.

Advancing the Understanding of Theories

I based this study on theories of ethnic identity (Phinney & Rotherham, 1987) and attachment (Bowlby, 1969, 1982). I also applied Chickering's vectors of student identity theory in relation to Korean adoptees in higher education. This present study advances the understanding of ethnic identity, attachment, and student identity as supported by the findings.

The participants recognized their Korean ethnic identity at different phases of their lives. Contextual situations and exposure to other Korean adoptees or other Asians influenced their recognition of Korean ethnicity. This advances the understanding of ethnic identity theory in which Phinney and Rotherham (1987) posited that individuals identified belonging to an ethnic group wherein feelings, thoughts, behaviors, thinking, and perceptions were influenced by group membership. In this study, participants who had traveled back to Korea or experienced Korean cultural activities expressed feelings of being Korean. I suggest that this finding of the study contributes to ethnic identity theory because Korean adoptees' participation and experiences in Korean culture strengthened their Korean ethnicity.

Attachment theory attempts to explain complex behaviors exhibited between a mother and child (Bowlby, 1969, 1982). The complex behavior system is present at birth and forms an

attachment between mother and infant. The theory postulates that the child will feel secure if a strong attachment is formed. If a child is threatened with abandonment or separation from their mother, they experience anger or anxiety. In the case of Korean adoptees, they have been separated at birth or shortly after birth from their mothers. Some were abandoned at later stages of development. In the present study, most of the participants stated feeling of disconnection in their adoptive families. One participant stated feelings of anxiety and fear of losing his adoptive family or the house burning down. Two of them had a fear of being abandoned by their adoptive family. I suggest that these feelings of anxiety and fear resulted from being separated from their birth mother. Nature and nurture were noted by Bowlby (1969, 1982) as interacting agents of attachment throughout development. This concept is supported by the findings of this present study. Participants who experienced nurturing adoptive families reported feelings of closeness and attachment to the adoptive family members.

I applied Chickering's (1969, 1972) vectors of student development theory in the examination of the Korean adoptees' experience in higher education. Most participants stated that going to college was their first time being away from home for an extended time. Most expressed that college was an expected next step in their education, which could be considered as a vector of the development of purpose. One participant stated that going to college was "important for people to get away because it helps them grow up." This view aligns with the vector of moving through autonomy to developing interdependence. All 14 participants had to deal with the model minority myth (Wing, 2007) and learn how to respond in such situations. This could be related to the vectors of interpersonal relationships and management of emotions. The experiences of the participants are aligned with the developmental vectors and I propose that the present findings help advance the understanding of this theory.

Institutional influences on student development were clarity of institutional objectives, institutional size, curriculum, teaching, and evaluation, residence hall arrangements, faculty and administration, and friends, groups, and student culture (Chickering, 1969, 1972). In the present study, two participants reported they were affected by curriculum. One was a piano major and the other was a vocal major, but they were assumed to be violin or piano majors because they were Asian. None of the participants talked about institutional objectives, size, or residence hall arrangements. Some talked about having positive interactions with faculty. One talked about negative experiences with a faculty member. Most of them expressed that friends and groups of friends were important in their higher education experiences. Student culture and finding other groups of Asian or Korean peers on campus was mentioned as being important by a few participants.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine how attachment and lived experiences influenced Korean adoptees in their pursuit of higher education. It was discovered that adoptive familial expectations were the prominent factor in the participants' desire to go to college or university. Community expectations were subtle forces in some of the participants' narratives. Also, some individuals believed that being Korean or Asian was a factor in their desire to achieve academically.

While this population of individuals has experienced the loss of birth culture and birth family, they have gained footholds in American culture. However, they sometimes experience the challenges of stereotypes and the burden to prove that they belong in spaces of higher education. Further research could be helpful for the parents and Korean adoptees who are planning higher educational pursuits. Moreover, the root of these questions is connected to issues

of adoption and how adoption reform and adoption practices affect the adoptees and their

families.

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Appendix A: Notice of IRB Approval

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885

Dear Janeice,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled

(IRB# 20-022   )is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Script for initiating the interview

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. I am going to ask you some questions about your perceptions. They are about your experiences growing up as a Korean adoptee, your relationships to family and friends, and also about you wanting to earn a degree in higher education. The interview can be stopped at any time you feel uncomfortable. If there are questions that you are uncomfortable answering, you can feel free to not answer them. Is it okay to go ahead? Ok. Thank you.

The first set of questions are about how you see yourself in relationship to your birth culture and how it may or may not have influenced your desire to earn a college degree.

1. Can you tell about your knowledge of your birth culture?

2. What supports did you have that encouraged you to learn about your birth culture?

3. Did your knowledge of your birth culture influence your desire to achieve in school? In what ways?

4. Can you share any experiences that happened prior to college that supported or hindered academic pursuit?

5. Can you describe your feelings about attachment to your birth culture?

6. How would you describe your identity?

This set of questions are about perceptions of adopted culture and how they may or may not have influenced your desire to go to college and earn a degree.

7. Explain your perception of adopted culture.

8. Did being adopted make a difference in your own perception of school and academic learning?

9. What were some of your experiences in school and how did they influence you?

10. Have you heard of the model minority myth? What are your perceptions of this?

11. Can you share any experiences that occurred with friend in relationship to school and expectations?

12. Describe your relationships with your teachers in high school and in college.

13. How do you describe your feelings about attachment to your adopted culture?

14. In what ways do you describe your identity within adopted culture?

These next questions are about your perceptions relating to your family.

15. What were the expectations in your family concerning your education?

16. Tell about your own expectations concerning your education.

17. How did your own identity influence your education and desire to go to college?

18. Describe your family relationship.

19. In what ways would you describe your attachment to your family members?

20. How would you describe your identity within your family?

Is there anything else that you would like to add? Any additional thoughts?